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Religion and the Problem of Evil (II)
Religion und das Problem des Bösen (II)

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Editorial RES 2/2024

Religion and the Problem of Evil (II) Religion und das Problem des Bösen (II)

Theologists and philosophers have always dedicated their efforts into finding a valid answer to the question regarding the existence of natural and human evil. This particular subject matter of *RES*, dedicated to the *Problem of Evil*, addresses the topic in two issues. In the first issue (*RES* 1/2024) the articles primarily explore the concepts of evil, malevolence, and the problem of evil from historical and traditional perspectives. In contrast, this second issue (*RES* 2/2024) compiles studies that examine themes from modern and contemporary viewpoints. Here, the authors open the dialogue beyond the main theological discussions concerning the nature of evil, particularly from more philosophical perspectives. The focus is primarily on the way non-theological disciplines approach such an intricate subject. By contrasting these types of approaches, the two issues provide an insightful examination of the evolving understandings of evil, highlighting the lenses through which humanity has conceptualized and confronted malevolence throughout history.

In the first paper of the second issue **Matthias Laux** revisits the interpretations of evil by Leibniz, Kant, Nietzsche and Musil, examining it

Die Frage, warum es das natürliche Übel und das menschliche Böse gibt, ist ein zentrales Thema für Theologie und Philosophie gleichermaßen. *RES* widmet zwei Nummern diesem Thema. In der ersten Nummer (*RES* 1/2024) wurden die Begriffe des Bösen und der Bosheit und das Problem des Bösen vor allem aus historischer und traditioneller Sicht beleuchtet. Die vorliegende zweite Nummer (*RES* 2/2024) enthält dagegen Aufsätze, die das Thema aus moderner und zeitgenössischer Sicht beleuchten. Hier öffnen die Autoren den Dialog über die theologischen Hauptdiskussionen über das Wesen des Bösen hinaus, insbesondere hin zu eher philosophischen Perspektiven. Der Schwerpunkt liegt darauf, wie sich nicht-theologische Disziplinen einem so komplexen Thema nähern. Durch die Gegenüberstellung dieser verschiedenen Ansätze bieten die beiden Nummern eine aufschlussreiche Untersuchung des sich entwickelnden Verständnisses des Bösen und verdeutlichen die Verschiebungen in der Art und Weise, wie die Menschheit das Böse konzeptualisiert und ihm begegnet.

Im ersten Beitrag greift **Matthias Laux** die Interpretationen des Bösen durch Leibniz, Kant, Nietzsche und Musil auf und untersucht sie aus der Perspektive der metaphysischen Macht Gottes über das Böse. **Robert**

from the perspective of God's metaphysical power over evil. **Robert Pfützner** investigates the formulae of evil that emerged within the framework of socialist and communist ideologies, concentrating on three types of conceptualizations: abstract evil, evil in others, and evil in oneself. **Paul Curtis'** contribution focuses on morality and theistic assumptions within the context of *power* as the foundation for metaethics. He addresses the definition of good in morality as the functional exercise of power. **Christophe Facal** argues that the problem of evil serves as potential evidence against simulation hypothesis, an argument that has not been explored so far. **Edward Kanterian** reveals that detachment from ethical inquiries is unbearable for a philosopher, as core philosophical questions consistently lean towards the human being, including the philosopher themselves. An idea less explored, denounced by Bonhoeffer, that the stupidity leads to greatest possible evil, is analysed by **Ilie Răpcianu**. Building on Arendt's concept of the "banality of evil," **Eveline Cioflec** demonstrates that conscious plurality, achieved through inner dialogue, is essential for preventing evil actions.

In addition to these articles, there are two essays that delve deeper into the intricate concept and nature of evil. In the first essay, **Peter M. S. Hacker** explores various ways of discussing evil from multiple perspectives and nuances, including

Pfützner untersucht die Formeln des Bösen, die im Rahmen sozialistischer und kommunistischer Ideologien entstanden sind, und konzentriert sich dabei auf drei Arten von Konzeptualisierungen: das abstrakte Böse, das Böse im Anderen und das Böse in sich selbst. **Paul Curtis'** Beitrag konzentriert sich auf Moral und theistische Annahmen im Kontext von Macht als Grundlage der Metaethik. Er behandelt die Definition des Guten in der Moral als funktionale Machtausübung. **Christophe Facal** argumentiert, dass das Problem des Bösen als potenzieller Beweis gegen die Simulationshypothese dient – ein Argument, das bisher noch nicht vorgebracht wurde. **Edward Kanterian** zeigt auf, dass es für einen Philosophen unerträglich ist, sich von ethischen Fragen zu distanzieren, da sich die zentralen philosophischen Fragen stets auf den Menschen beziehen, auch auf den Philosophen selbst. Seltener diskutiert wird der Gedanke von Dietrich Bonhoeffer, nämlich dass die Dummheit das reinste Übel sei; dies wird von **Ilie Răpcianu** in seinem Aufsatz erörtert. Aufbauend auf Arendts Konzept der „Banalität des Bösen“ zeigt **Eveline Cioflec**, dass bewusste Pluralität, die durch inneren Dialog erreicht wird, wesentlich ist, um böse Handlungen zu verhindern.

Zusätzlich zu diesen Aufsätzen befassen sich zwei Essays eingehender mit dem komplizierten Konzept und dem Wesen des Bösen. Im ersten Aufsatz untersucht **Peter M. S. Hacker** Möglichkeiten,

cultural, philological, and semantic aspects. The second essay, by **Dmitry Biriukov**, provides an incisive exploration of the problem of unbearable pain.

In the review section, two recent books dedicated to the problem of evil are examined. One is *Plato's Theodicy*, by Viktor Ilievski, reviewed here by **Florin George Calian**. The other one is *The Hardest Problem. God, Evil and Suffering*, by Rupert Shortt, reviewed here by **Otniel Vereş**.

All these interdisciplinary approaches demonstrate that the problem of evil and its associated questions present challenges that cannot be resolved straightforwardly. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the new editorial team of RES, from the Universities of Sibiu and of Joensuu, and particularly to the editor-in-chief **Rotraut Barth**, whose work is indispensable for every issue of RES.

das Böse aus unterschiedlichen Perspektiven und Nuancen zu diskutieren, einschließlich kultureller, philologischer und semantischer Aspekte. Der zweite Beitrag, gezeichnet von **Dmitry Biriukov**, bietet eine prägnante Erkundung des Problems der unerträglichen Schmerzen.

Im Rezensionsteil werden zwei neuere Bücher untersucht, die sich mit dem Problem des Bösen befassen. Das eine ist *Plato's Theodicy* von Viktor Ilievski, das hier von **Florin George Calian** rezensiert wird, das andere, *The Hardest Problem. God, Evil and Suffering*, von Rupert Shortt, hier besprochen von **Otniel Vereş**.

Diese interdisziplinären Ansätze zeigen auf je unterschiedliche Weise, weshalb es auf das Problem des Bösen und die damit zusammenhängenden Fragen keine einfachen Antworten gibt.

An dieser Stelle möchte ich dem neuen Redaktionsteam der Universitäten Sibiu und Joensuu und insbesondere der Chefredakteurin **Rotraut Barth**, deren Arbeit für jede Ausgabe von RES unverzichtbar ist, meinen Dank aussprechen.

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Leibniz' und Kants Anthropozentrierung des Bösen und das neue Böse bei Nietzsche und Musil

MATTHIAS LAUX*

Leibniz's metaphysics already justifies evil not only through the normative power of God, assuming that it is simultaneously the omnipotence of reason. For Kant, evil becomes definitively the sole problem of the rational being, human. While for Leibniz, the divine will had organized all practical relations of humans and movements of the physical world in such a way that the practical reason of all individuals is metaphysically constituted and evil is justified, Kant shifts the focus to the practical reason of humans as autonomous subjects. In this paradigm, God loses his metaphysical power, retaining only a moral role. Nietzsche and Musil build upon this context, yet surprisingly, they do not further advance this development. Instead, they reject the power of pure reason, which becomes absolute for Kant. Simultaneously, they draw on God's metaphysical power over evil to formulate their concept of the new evil that confronts us in the practical contexts of modern life.

Keywords: *normative theory, ethical evil, moral judgment, history of philosophy, modern philosophy, classical modernity, Nietzsche, Musil, Leibniz, Kant*

I. Das Böse und der Mensch

Die anhaltende Präsenz von Kriegen und Genoziden, aber auch das Artensterben, der Klimawandel, die Zerstörung der Lebenswelt zukünftiger Generationen und unbeachteter Teile der Welt und nicht zuletzt deren Organisation durch Strukturen der Diskriminierungen und Ausbeutung sind uns heute drängende Fragen, die auch und vor allem moralisch herausfordern. Das Böse scheint dabei nur noch selten ein Begriff zu sein, mit dem diesen Fragen begegnet werden kann. Nach einer verbreiteten Sicht wird es bei Nietzsche und ausgehend davon in der Literatur der Klassischen Moderne vor und zwischen den Weltkriegen ganz in einem ethischen Relativismus aufgelöst. Das hat nicht geringen Anteil daran, dass die Rede vom Bösen auch antiquiert klingt, wenn wir die Frage stellen, ob das Handeln und Fortbestehen der Menschen angesichts des daraus resultierenden und anhaltenden Leids moralisch zu rechtfertigen

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ist. So scheint damit eine relativ junge Frage vorgelegt, als Anthropodizee, die wie eine Theodizee aus besonderen historischen Konstellationen hervortritt.¹ Trotz der moralisch herausfordernden Probleme adelt dann allein das ethische Problembewusstsein die Gegenwart.

Tatsächlich hat sich aber gerade dieser belastende Blick auf das menschliche Handeln aus Versuchen, das Böse zu denken, entwickelt, welche eine lange Tradition beanspruchen, die sich auch durch das christliche Weltbild und die Rechtfertigung Gottes zieht. Wird das Verhältnis von Nietzsche und seinen Epigonen und Auswirkungen zum Bösen von da aus betrachtet, scheint darin vielmehr die Möglichkeit zu liegen, die Befragung des Bösen auf uns heute noch beschäftigende Problemkomplexe zu beziehen. Besonders deutlich wird das in Robert Musils Lebenswerk *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. Während Nietzsche nie um eine polemische Radikalität verlegen ist, die erklärtermaßen mit allem bricht, arbeitet der österreichische Schriftsteller diese Beziehung von Nietzsches Philosophie und der Tradition des Denkens des Bösen literarisch hervor, wenn er zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen mit den geistesgeschichtlichen Strömungen seiner Zeit und ihren Konsequenzen ringt.

Diese Anthropozentrierung des Bösen verdankt sich selbst einer Denktradition, an die Nietzsche und Musil anknüpfen, um sie zu transformieren. Sie ist verbunden mit der Herausbildung eines ganz bestimmten Bildes vom Menschen und seinem moralischen Handeln. Diese Bilder werden zur Prüfung gestellt, wenn Nietzsche und Musil eine neue Perspektive auf das Böse vorzubringen versuchen, die noch für uns heute Aktualität zu beanspruchen vermag.

II. Das Böse, die Möglichkeit und die Physik bei Leibniz und Musil

Mit der prästabilierten Disharmonie, dem Prinzip der unzureichenden Gründe des Daseins, dem Satz von der Erhaltung des Unrechts, aber auch mit dem statistischen Schicksal und dem Gott des Mittelwerts entwirft Musil für den *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* eine Reihe von Gedanken, welche oft als rein polemische Gegenbegriffe zu Leibniz verstanden

¹ Vgl. Georg Cavallar, „Kants Weg von der Theodizee zur Anthropodizee und retour. Verspätete Kritik an Odo Marquard,“ in *Kant-Studien. Philosophische Zeitschrift der Kant-Gesellschaft*, Band 84, Heft 1, Hrg. Manfred Baum et al. (Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 1993), 90.

werden.² Rückt seine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Bösen in den Fokus, scheint mir aufschlussreich, in welcher Weise diese Gedanken sich kritisch, aber auch konstruktiv an ihren Vorbildern abarbeiten. Das Böse erscheint uns bei Leibniz in einer Variante, deren Erörterung noch im christlichen Weltbild verankert ist und demnach kaum Beziehungen zu den Fragen aufzuwerfen scheint, die Musil in Anschluss an Nietzsche an das Böse richtet. Tatsächlich setzt hier eine Anthropozentrierung des Bösen ein, an die Nietzsche und Musil anschließen. Und es zeigt sich gerade in Gottes Rolle diesem Bösen gegenüber ein überraschender Anknüpfungspunkt, von dem aus sie der Reduktion des Bösen durch seine Anthropozentrierung und damit einem ethische Traditionen tragenden Modell von menschlicher Praxis entgegentreten.

Das *malum metaphysicum* besteht in der „ursprüngliche[n] Unvollkommenheit“ menschlicher Geschöpfe.³ Damit ist das Böse für Leibniz nicht etwa in einer Lehre von der Erbsünde verankert, sondern in der logisch und metaphysisch notwendigen Begrenztheit der Menschen gegenüber Gott „vor aller Sünde, weil Begrenzung zum Wesen der Kreatur gehört“.⁴ Das metaphysische Böse gibt es trotz der Allgüte Gottes, weil er aufgrund seiner alleinigen Allmacht Ebenbilder schafft, die selbst nicht allmächtig und allgütig, weil keine Götter neben ihm sein können.⁵ Gott will nicht das moralische Böse, ihm mangelt es nicht an Güte und er will auch nicht die physischen Übel und das Leiden der Menschen, auch wenn er es als „Strafe [...] zur Besserung und Abschreckung“ nutzt oder „um grössere Uebel zu hindern oder um grössere Güter zu erlangen“.⁶ Sein Wille schafft notwendig die beste aller möglichen Welten, muss darin aber aufgrund seines Wissens um die Imperfektion seiner Geschöpfe das Böse und die Übel „zulassen“.⁷

² Vgl. Mandy Dröscher-Teile, Birgit Nübel, „Intertextualität,“ in *Robert-Musil-Handbuch*, Hrg. Birgit Nübel und Norbert Christian Wolf (Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 2016), 766.

³ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Die Theodizee*, Hrg. Ernst Cassirer, übersetzt v. Artur Buchenau (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968), § 20, vgl. § 21.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ Vgl. *Ibidem*, § 31.

⁶ *Ibidem*, § 23. Nietzsches und Musils Auseinandersetzung mit Schuld und Strafe, als genealogische Prozesse der Konstitution praktischer Subjekte, knüpft auch daran an. Dies muss aber aus dem hier verfügbaren Rahmen fallen.

⁷ *Ibidem*, § 25.

Besonders interessant in Hinblick auf Musil und Nietzsche ist, dass Leibniz dies besonders einsichtig wird, wenn die Erörterung des Bösen in Analogie zur Betrachtung der Physis tritt. „[E]in vollkommenes Bild und gleichsam das Modell von der ursprünglichen Beschränktheit der Geschöpfe“ ist somit in der „natürlichen Trägheit der Körper“ gegeben, von der bereits der „berühmte Keppler und Herr Descartes [...] gesprochen“ haben.⁸ Er kommt auf die physikalische Variante seine Möglichkeitsbegriffs zu sprechen; die Kraft, die er implizit in ihrer kritischen Abgrenzung von Newton und Descartes formuliert.⁹ In Leibniz' Naturphilosophie tritt die Möglichkeit, als Kraft, explizit in einer Alternative zur kartesischen und newtonschen Physik auf und wird als solche schließlich im Energie-Begriff bis in die wissenschaftlichen Revolutionen tradiert, die Musil interessieren, wenn er sich mit der Thermodynamik auseinandersetzt und schon Nietzsche, wenn er Rugjer Josip Bošković und die Auflösung des Atoms im Kraftbegriff als wissenschaftliche Voraussetzung seines Willens zur Macht begreift.¹⁰

Er bedeutet aber auch eine kritische Transformation des aristotelischen Hylemorphismus. Bei Leibniz braucht es kein beharrendes Drittes zwischen Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit, da er mit der Kraft, die naturphilosophische Variante seines erneuerten Möglichkeitsbegriffs vorlegt.¹¹ Material wird nicht bewegt, es wird selbst dynamisch, denn das Mögliche schließt alle potenziellen Wirklichkeiten ein, sodass es nicht mehr defizitär gegenüber Wirklichem und nun essentiell ist: Etwas ist dieses Bestimmte Etwas, aufgrund der Gesamtheit seiner Möglichkeiten. Verwirklichung besteht nicht in der hinzukommenden Form, sondern im Mehr an Essenz, einem Plus an Möglichkeit gegenüber anderen Möglichkeiten.¹²

⁸ *Ibidem*, § 30.

⁹ Vgl. *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ Vgl. Eberhard Tiemann, „Lebendige Kraft wird Energie. Leibniz' Beitrag zur Kinetik“, in *Leibniz – Auf den Spuren des großen Denkers. Forschungsmagazin der Leibniz Universität Hannover. Schwerpunktthema „Leibniz“* (Hannover: Leibniz Universität, 2006) 42-45. Vgl. William Berkson, *Fields of Force. The Development of a World View from Faraday to Einstein* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 25-50.

¹¹ Vgl. Klaus Jacobi, „Möglichkeit“, in *Handbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe, Band 4*, Hrg. Hermann Krings, Hans Michael Baumgartner, Christoph Wild (München: Kösel, 1973), 938-39. Vgl. in Hinblick auf Nietzsches Rezeption: Günter Abel, *Nietzsche: Die Dynamik der Willen zur Macht und die ewige Wiederkehr* (Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 1998), 8-12, 17-27.

¹² Vgl. Antonella Balestra, *Kontingente Wahrheiten: Ein Beitrag zur Leibnizschen Metaphysik der Substanz* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), 76-77, 83-84.

Alle Möglichkeiten, die sich nicht widersprechen und damit kompatibel sind, bilden eine mögliche Welt, nur die, in der sie die höchste Harmonie aufweisen, wird realisiert. In Gottes Wissen sind alle möglichen Welten beinhaltet, sein daraus auswählender Wille aktualisiert die beste.¹³

In einer Welt, in der die Unendlichkeit der Möglichkeiten immer im Verhältnis zueinander realisiert werden muss, besteht die fortwährende Schöpfung Gottes in ihrem Arrangement zur stets größtmöglichen Harmonie, in der das Maximum an Gesamtglück gesichert ist. Voltaires *Candide* entfesselt dagegen eine Polemik, welche die Rede von der besten aller möglichen Welten zu einer populären Floskel für jeden naiven Konformismus gemacht hat. Alles Unglück ist in Gottes Weisheit begründet und noch die weltlichen Sanktionierungssysteme erscheinen als Ausdruck der von ihm aufgestellten moralischen Grundordnung. Allerdings zeichnet der *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* wieder ein ganz ähnliches Bild. Gleich auf den ersten Seiten wird der Zusammenhang von Möglichkeitsbegriff und Gott aufgenommen: „Das Mögliche umfaßt [...] auch die noch nicht erwachten Absichten Gottes“.¹⁴ Als Möglichkeiten schlummern sie ewig in Gottes Wissen, bis sein Wille sie verwirklicht. Kurz darauf lässt Musil die jugendliche Version seines Protagonisten den Gedanken formulieren, dass „Gott von seiner Welt am liebsten im Conjunctivus potentialis [redet...], denn Gott macht die Welt und denkt dabei, es könnte ebensogut anders sein“.¹⁵ Bei Leibniz sind alle durch den göttlichen Willen vorgebrachten, endlichen Wahrheiten so mit einem Zeit-Index versehen, dass auch immer das Gegenteil möglich sein könnte.¹⁶ Das Bivalenz-Prinzip beherrscht ausnahmslos alle möglichen

Vgl. Sebastian Bender, *Leibniz' Metaphysik der Modalität* (Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 2016), 167.

¹³ Durch die Transformation der aristotelischen *Dynamis* in die essenzielle Potenz, die alle Materie in Kraft auflöst, kann Leibniz ein antikes Alibi Gottes gegenüber dem Bösen für ein christliches Weltbild reanimieren, in der kein Demiurg mehr Material ordnet, sondern der Schöpfer aus dem Nichts schafft. Damit wird auch Leibniz' Gott aber zu einem ordnenden Gott. Er operiert mit dem Satz des zureichenden Grundes, um das holistische Geflecht der Möglichkeiten in jedem Moment und in der Zeit zu strukturieren; das tut er frei, aber darin vernünftig und die Begründungszusammenhänge in die kontinuierliche Kette des Weltlaufs fügend.

¹⁴ Robert Musil, „Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften“ (MoE), in *Gesammelte Werke, Band 1-5*, Hrg. Adolf Frisé (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1978), 17.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 19.

¹⁶ Vgl. Balestra, *Kontingente Wahrheiten*, 55-57. Vgl. Wilfrid Sellars, *Philosophical Perspectives: History of Philosophy* (Atascadero: Ridgeview Publishing, 2011), 142.

Welten, aber zwischen ihnen müssen Widersprüche bestehen. Das Gegenteil könnte in einer anderen möglichen Welt wahr sein. Und genau darin zeichnet sich das aus, was Leibniz in kritisch konstruktiver Wendung gegen den Aristotelismus Kontingenz nennt und damit diesen Begriff für die Ideengeschichte grundlegt.¹⁷ Etwas ist kontingent, weil es wirklich, aber nicht notwendig ist.

An diesen Kontingenzbegriff knüpft Musil an, wenn er in zurecht viel beachteten Entwürfen aus seinem Nachlass so etwas wie die Rolle des Antipoden zum Gott von Leibniz ausbaut. Er spricht dort von den Liebenden, die in der Lage sind, den von der Schöpfung unbedachten Möglichkeiten, den zweit-, dritt-, bis unendlich besten und schlechtesten Welten Beachtung und Realität zu schenken: „Der Liebende liebt die möglichen Leben, die verdrängt worden sind, erweckt sie, ist ein Geschöpf unzähliger Welten.“¹⁸

Zwar soll noch wichtig werden, wie Musils Liebender sich hier von der göttlichen Ordnung abwendet, zunächst sei aber die Aufmerksamkeit darauf gelenkt, dass auch dieser die möglichen Leben nur erwecken kann, nicht selbst generieren. Er bedient sich der noch nicht erwachten Absichten Gottes, die damit immer noch notwendig seinem Wissen entstammen. Woher hat der Liebende seine Wahlmöglichkeiten, wenn er dem unendlichen Wissen Gottes um alle möglichen Handlungen nicht entrinnen kann? Oder anders gefragt: Ist dieser Liebende mehr als ein Sünder, ist er mehr als ein Repräsentant des ethisch Bösen als Manifestation seiner metaphysischen Notwendigkeit? Dass es zur Bestimmung dieser neuen Freiheit unter Gott mit der emphatischen Affirmation unverwirklichter Potenziale in ihrer Kontextsensitivität allein kaum getan sein kann, zeigt sich schon, wenn in allen Entwürfen, die Musil von Mitte der Dreißiger bis in die späten Dreißiger hinein über diesen Liebenden als Geschöpf unzähliger Welten anfertigt, dieses Bekenntnis immer umgehend revidiert wird: „«Nein!» wiederholte Ulrich. «Das Rechte ist das noch immer nicht!»“.¹⁹

¹⁷ Vgl. Peter Vogt, *Kontingenz und Zufall: Eine Ideen- und Begriffsgeschichte* (Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 2011), 12-13, 49-58.

¹⁸ Musil, *Klagenfurter Ausgabe (KA)*, *Kommentierte digitale Edition sämtlicher Werke, Briefe und nachgelassener Schriften. Mit Transkriptionen und Faksimiles aller Handschriften*, Hrg. Walter Fanta, Klaus Amann, Karl Corino (Klagenfurt: Robert-Musil-Institut, DVD-Version 2009), Mappe V/2/52 (1934-35).

¹⁹ Musil, MoE, 1111 (1937-38). Vgl. Musil, KA, Mappe V/2/52 (1934-35), Mappe V/2/96, V/2/172 (1939).

Auch als ein solches potenzielles Geschöpf unzähliger Welten bleibt der Mensch in das Bild der Ordnung Gottes eingefügt, das Musil zu Anfang seines Romans aktiviert. Wenn dessen Möglichkeiten auch die nicht erwachten Absichten Gottes sind, ist deutlich, wer die Geschichte wirklich kontrolliert:

Nehmen wir also auch an, eine bestimmte Menge von Ideen fliegt in der Gegenwart durcheinander; sie ergibt irgendeinen wahrscheinlichsten Mittelwert; der verschiebt sich ganz langsam und automatisch, und das ist der sogenannte Fortschritt oder der geschichtliche Zustand; das Wichtigste aber ist, daß es dabei auf unsere persönliche, einzelne Bewegung gar nicht ankommt, wir können rechts oder links, hoch oder tief denken und handeln, neu oder alt, unberechenbar oder überlegt: es ist für den Mittelwert ganz gleichgültig, und Gott und Welt kommt es nur auf ihn an, nicht auf uns!²⁰

Musil knüpft darin an die thermodynamische Differenzierung von Makro- und Mikrophysik an. Betrachten wir ein ideales Gas, lassen sich durch die statistische Gesamtverteilung aller möglichen Bewegungen in dem Gas makroskopische Bezugsgrößen, wie Dichte, Volumen oder Temperatur, zuverlässig berechnen, ohne dass wir die einzelnen Atombewegungen und ihre kausalen Relationen untereinander kennen müssten. Zwei Gase gleichen Makrozustands können sehr unterschiedliche individuelle Atombewegungen beinhalten.²¹ Vor diesem Hintergrund wird das Böse zu einer statistischen Bezugsgröße für sozio-normative Systeme, die sich durch den Lauf der Geschichte erhalten muss. Gott ist hier, als Lenker der Menschheitsgeschichte, der Herrscher über die Gesetzte der Verteilung und Verwirklichung von Ideen, die seiner Herrschaft über Naturgesetze gleichen, die jetzt die statistischen Gesetze sind, mit der uns die Gaskinetik zurücklässt.

Dieses rätselhaft erscheinende Bild von einem mit dem Gesetz der großen Zahl statistisch den Wettlauf beherrschenden Gott kann gerade entlang von Leibniz' Analogie zwischen der Betrachtung des Bösen und der Physis verständlicher werden. Dieser nutzt das Bild von zwei Schiffen, die von der Strömung bewegt werden – eins ist mit Holz und das andere mit Stein beladen. Die „Kraft, mit der der Strom auf die Schiffe wirkt“ wird mit Gottes Willen vergleichbar, sowie „die Trägheit des Stoffes

²⁰ Musil, MoE, 491.

²¹ Vgl. Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker und Jonathon Juilfs, *Physik der Gegenwart* (Göttingen: Vandenhöck & Ruprecht, 1958), 33-42.

[...mit] der natürlichen Unvollkommenheit der Geschöpfe und die Langsamkeit des [mit Stein] beladenen Schiffes“ mit den Verfehlungen eines Menschen, seinen schlechten Eigenschaften und Taten.²² Vor dem Hintergrund dieser Analogie von den Möglichkeiten der Menschen, böse zu handeln, und der Möglichkeit der Bewegung in der Physis scheint es dann naheliegend, das Problem des Bösen im Spiegel des von Leibniz auf Grundlage seines Möglichkeitsbegriffes formulierten Erhaltungssatzes zu lesen. Musil legt dazu einen besonders prägnanten Versuch vor, wenn er die Handlungswelt Kakaniens als Seinesgleichen geschieht beschreibt: „Ein Grundsatz ‚Von der Erhaltung des Unrechts‘ schien das Leben zu beherrschen, wie der Satz von der Erhaltung des Stoffes oder der der Energie die tote Schöpfung beherrscht.“²³ Das Leben wird von einem Prinzip geleitet, das Musils Protagonist auch als „Prinzip des unzureichenden Grundes“ anspricht²⁴ und das ausgeht von einem Gott, der nur am Mittelwert interessiert ist. Dieses Verhältnis ist grundsätzlich transformiert, aber Musil knüpft hier noch an eine Darstellung des Bösen an, das sich einem göttlichen Plan für die Menschenwelt fügt.

III. Das Böse in Musils statistischem Schicksal und Nietzsches *amor fati*

Geht das metaphysische Böse auch ganz zu Lasten der Unvollkommenheit der Kreatur, ist es doch eingefügt in einen göttlichen Plan, der in seiner Allwissenheit die menschliche Begrenztheit einkalkuliert und dem Individuum als sein Schicksal gegenübertritt. Ebendiese Entlastung des menschlichen Handelns übernimmt nun auch Musil. Und er kann sich damit überraschenderweise in der Folge Nietzsches wissen.

Die Konstanz der Gesamtenergie, die Musil mit dem Satz der Erhaltung des Unrechts auf moralisches Gebiet überträgt,²⁵ ist ein wichtiges Postulat in Nietzsches Verbindung seines Willens zur Macht und seiner Ewigen Wiederkehr. Auch er verwendet dabei den Begriff der Kraft im Zusammenhang mit dem der Möglichkeit. Wenn die Gesamt-Energie der Machtkräfte und damit die Zahl der Möglichkeiten im Gesamten nicht abnehmen oder zunehmen kann, müssen in der Länge der Zeit

²² Leibniz, *Theodizee*, § 30.

²³ Musil, KA, Mappe VII/9/52, VII/9/66 (1932-1933).

²⁴ Musil, MoE, 134.

²⁵ Vgl. Musil, KA, Mappe II/3/32, II/3/100 (1934), VII/9/52, VII/9/66 (1932-1933). Vgl. *Idem*, MoE, 399.

alle Möglichkeitskombinationen wiederkehren.²⁶ Mit seiner Deutung von Gottes Ordnen der möglichen Welten zur jetzt durchschnittlich bestmöglichen, also dem Mittelwert entsprechenden Welt, bleibt Musil so im Bild der ewigen Wiederkehr Nietzsches, wenn „im Durchschnitt immer die gleichen Möglichkeiten bleiben, die sich wiederholen“.²⁷ Das Schicksal bleibt intakt, „– ja! was man so tut, ist immer schon geschehen, man wiederholt es nur, es vollzieht sich unirdisch leicht, man sieht sich im Spiegel des Ewigen und weiß, was man zu tun hat.“²⁸ Doch es verändert sich merklich: „«Heute macht das Schicksal eher den Eindruck der übergeordneten Bewegung einer Masse» meinte er; «man steckt darin und wird mitgewälzt».“²⁹ Und es wird bereits im Verhältnis des Individuums zum göttlichen Mittelwert aufgelöst: „In späteren, besser unterrichteten Zeiten wird das Wort Schicksal wahrscheinlich einen statistischen Inhalt gewinnen.“³⁰

Wie sich dieses statistische Schicksal als Ausdruck des unzureichenden Grundes des Gott des Mittelwerts von Leibniz' Fatum unterscheidet, soll noch zur Debatte stehen. Zunächst fällt daran auf, dass auch damit an Nietzsche angeschlossen ist. Der Begriff des Fatums fasziniert Nietzsche schon seit seinen frühesten jugendlichen Gehversuchen in der Philosophie und wird bis in sein Spätwerk immer wieder ausbuchstabiert.³¹ „Der Einzelne ist ein Stück *fatum*, von Vorne und von Hinten, ein Gesetz mehr, eine Nothwendigkeit mehr für Alles, was kommt und sein wird.“³² Ebenso ist für Leibniz das menschliche Individuum eine individuelle Substanz oder Monade, wie alles übrige, und damit aus dem Möglichkeitsgeflecht konstituiert, das Gottes Schöpfungsplan fortwährend entwirft. Als solches ist es Gesetz und Notwendigkeit, weil in ihm die gesetzmäßige Verknüpfung aller kommenden Geschehnisse

²⁶ Vgl. etwa Friedrich Nietzsche, „Nachlaß 1887-1889,“ in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Band 13, Hrg. Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari (München-Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), NF-1888,14[188], [81], [98].

²⁷ Musil, MoE, 17.

²⁸ Musil, KA, Mappe VII/8/45 (1924-26).

²⁹ Musil, MoE, 722.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 720.

³¹ Vgl. Josef M. Werle, *Nietzsches Projekt „Philosoph des Lebens“* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), 46, 56-64.

³² Vgl. Friedrich Nietzsche, „Götzen-Dämmerung,“ in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Band 6, Hrg. Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari (München-Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), Aph. Moral 6.

und Handlungen potenziell enthalten ist. Der auf das Individuum gemünzte, ethische Rat, mit dem uns Nietzsche zurücklässt, scheint den naiven Konformismus aus Voltaires Polemik nur zu affirmieren, um ihn noch drastisch zu überhöhen. Das Ziel, das dieser Ethik vorschwebt, ist mit dem von Leibniz identisch: die Bejahung des ganzen Daseins.³³ Für Nietzsche bedeutet das die Bejahung der Unschuld des Werdens. Sein *amor fati* stiftet nicht nur das Einvernehmen mit dem eigenen Schicksal, sondern soll auch die Lehre der ewigen Wiederkunft einverleiben. Das moralische Subjekt muss die Geschehnisse, genauso wie sie sich eingestellt haben, noch unendliche Male wieder erleben wollen. Die berühmte „Frage bei Allem und Jedem «willst du diess noch einmal und noch unzählige Male?» [...] die] als das grösste[s] *Schwergewicht* auf deinem Handeln“ liegt, ist zu bejahen.³⁴

Im *amor fati* Nietzsches wird offenbar, dass seine oft kosmologisch anmutende Rede von den Machtkräften, deren Energie konstant ist, genauso auf sein Denken von Moral bezogen ist. Bei Musil wird Moral ausdrücklich ein Spiel von Kräften.³⁵ Vor dem Hintergrund seiner Nietzsche-Rezeption und deren Fruchtbarmachung für das Profil seines Protagonisten versteht Musil bereits in Entwürfen von 1921 „das Böse“ als „Kraft“, die es zu befreien „gelingen müsste“.³⁶ In vielen Projekten fordert Ulrich die Übertragung naturwissenschaftlicher Methoden auf die Moral, ohne dabei eine naturalistische Ethik oder die positivistische Exklusion philosophischer Fragen zu predigen. Leibniz eröffnet eine Analogie zwischen den Lebensmöglichkeiten des moralischen Wesens Mensch und der Möglichkeit als Kraft in seiner Physik, an die Nietzsche

³³ Dieses Ja steht bei Leibniz in der Tradition der philosophischen Erörterung der Willensfreiheit, die sie in der Fähigkeit, etwas zu bejahen oder zu verneinen, identifiziert. Vor dem Hintergrund des in Gottes vernünftiger Wahl der Gesamtharmonie aufgelösten Bösen aber wird dieser freie Wille, insofern er nur die praktische Vernunft Gottes spiegeln kann, auf dieses Ja zu dem von ihm in jedem Moment präsentierten Dasein fixiert. Das Schicksal eines jeden Individuums mit all seinem Leid und Übel muss darin als gerechtfertigt erscheinen. Jeder Mensch muss als wahrlich freies, moralisches Wesen auch sein Fatum bejahen. Vgl. Leibniz, „Von dem Verhängnisse,“ in *Hauptschriften zur Grundlegung der Philosophie Teil II: Schriften zur Monadenlehre und zur Ethik und Rechtsphilosophie*, Hrg. Ernst Cassirer, übersetzt v. Artur Buchenau (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1996), 129-35.

³⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, „Die fröhliche Wissenschaft,“ in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Band 3, Hrg. Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari (München-Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), Aph. 341.

³⁵ Vgl. Musil, MoE, 251.

³⁶ Musil, *KA*, Heft 36/11-12 (1921). Idem, MoE, 1989.

und Musil anknüpfen. Allerdings scheinen sie damit das Böse einem Schicksal zu überantworten, von dem unklar ist, auf welcher Instanz es gründet, wenn für Nietzsche dieser Gott doch gestorben ist und seine Rückkehr im *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* dadurch gekennzeichnet ist, dass er sich jetzt um die Individuen nicht mehr kümmert.

Ist mit dem Satz der Erhaltung des Unrechts im Seinesgleichen und der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen das Böse nicht ganz menschlicher Verantwortung entzogen – mehr noch als unter der Geltung des göttlichen Plans bei Leibniz und ganz im Widerspruch zur Autonomie des praktischen Subjekts, als Grund, überhaupt moralisch handeln zu können? Ist es in einem metaphysischen Prinzip der Wiederholung aufgelöst? Tatsächlich scheint gerade Nietzsches Tod Gottes das Böse für Musil als unausweichliche, unveränderbare Größe in menschlichen Lebensvollzügen zu zementieren. Da die Rechtfertigung der Allgüte Gottes gegenüber dem Bösen nicht mehr relevant ist, verlagert sich diese Rechtfertigung auf das Böse selbst. Wenn Musil an den Fortsetzungsreihen schreibt, lässt er den Gerichtsarzt Pfeifer festhalten, „daß es eine Utopie ist, böse Menschen medizinisch heilen zu wollen, und überdies ein Nonsens, denn das Böse ist nicht nur in der Welt vorhanden, sondern auch unentbehrlich für ihren Fortbestand“.³⁷ Gehört dieser zu den parodierend eingesetzten Nebenfiguren, spricht sich Musils Protagonist zur selben Zeit doch ähnlich aus:

Wir brauchen eben das Böse. [...] Denn muß es nicht etwas, das schlechter ist als das andere, schon deshalb geben, weil wir nicht wüßten, wohin mit uns, wenn eine unserer Empfindungen so schön wäre wie die andere oder gar jede unserer Handlungen besser als ihre Vorgängerinnen?!³⁸

Damit stellt Musil die menschliche Unvollkommenheit auf den Kopf. Der Maßstab des Guten schwebt für ihn kraftlos fiktiv über der Zeit und den Kontexten, in denen Menschen wirklich handeln. Verfehlung, Scheitern, Leiden und Schaden gehören zu den Handlungsvollzügen, aus denen wir erst unsere moralische Empfindung und Identität und eine wertende Perspektive auf unser Handeln ausbilden können. Musil interessiert weniger, ob die Welt notwendig die beste ist, sondern vielmehr, dass wir das Böse immer schon vorfinden, wenn wir die Welt in ihrem aktuellen Zustand betrachten.

³⁷ Musil, *KA*, Mappe I/5/209 (1934); idem, MoE, 1359.

³⁸ Musil, *KA*, Mappe I/8/33 (1934); idem, MoE, 1934.

Der Mensch muss nicht notwendig das Böse tun. Aber in der ganzen Welt muss Böses getan werden, weil Menschen keine Götter oder Engel sind. Das ist die metaphysische Grundlage des Bösen bei Leibniz, die auch durch alltägliche Erfahrungen gestützt werden könnte. Musil bleibt bei Letzterem. Der Mensch zeichnet sich nicht durch die Begrenztheit gegenüber Gott aus, sondern durch das, was konkret getan wird. Böses geschieht und es geschieht durch Menschenhand. Sowohl mit dieser Rechtfertigung Gottes als auch des Bösen in der Welt ist seine Last zunehmend auf den Menschen verlagert. Allerdings scheint das Böse endgültig jeder kritischen Konfrontation entzogen, wenn es nicht einmal mehr im göttlichen Plan, sondern in der Wiederkehr des Gleichen und im Seinesgleichen geschieht, gerechtfertigt ist – zumal diese Prozesse jetzt in empirisch einsehbaren Determinationsprozessen auflösbar scheinen. Dass Nietzsche und Musil diese Konfrontation keinesfalls durch eine solch naturalistische Ethik entsorgen, kann ebenso mit Blick auf Leibniz deutlicher werden. Auch wenn für sie nicht die Freiheit des menschlichen Willens seine verantwortliche Beziehung gegenüber dem Bösen rettet, knüpfen sie doch beide an sein Modell ethischen Handelns an, um das Böse neu zu konfrontieren.

IV. Das Primat der Praxis und das Böse

Die parallele Herrschaft Gottes über das Reich der Physis und der menschlichen Handlungen, sowie deren Eingebundensein in das Schicksal, das allein von Gottes Willen abhängt, bedroht bereits für Leibniz die menschliche Freiheit und Verantwortung. Allerdings verteidigt er sein Konzept des ethisch Bösen und hält – etwa gegen die wiederholten Einwände in diesem Punkt von Seiten des Theologen und Newtonianers Samuel Clark – hartnäckig daran fest,³⁹ dass „weder dieses Vorauswissen noch die Vorherbestimmung die Freiheit beeinträchtigen“.⁴⁰

Was die moralische Notwendigkeit angeht, so beeinträchtigt sie die Freiheit ebenfalls nicht. Nämlich wenn ein weises Wesen, insbesondere Gott, das Beste wählt, dann ist es nicht weniger frei, im Gegenteil,

³⁹ Martha Mendonça, „Notwendigkeit und Zeit: Die leibnizsche Kritik des Grundsatzes von Aristoteles «omne quod est, dum est, necesse est esse»,“ in *Beiträge zu Leibniz' Rezeption der Aristotelischen Logik und Metaphysik*, Hrg. Antonio Nicolas und Niels Offenberger (Hildesheim: Georg Olms 2016), 133.

⁴⁰ Leibniz, Samuel Clarke, *Der Leibniz-Clarke-Briefwechsel*, Hrg. Volkmar Schüller (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1991), 77.

nämlich nicht daran gehindert zu werden, auf die beste Art und Weise zu handeln, ist gerade die vollkommenste Freiheit.⁴¹

Hier muss Leibniz selbst Gottes Freiheit verteidigen, denn an dieser Stelle wird entscheidend, dass sein mit dem Satz des zureichenden Grundes operierender Wille keinesfalls in der Determination eines kausal geschlossenen Weltbilds aufgeht. Leibniz stellt in seiner *Théodicée* den Parallelismus von einem Reich der Gnade und Zwecke und einem Reich der Natur und ihrer Wirkungszusammenhänge auf, wobei er explizit Aristoteles' *causes finales* und *causes efficientes* gegenüberstellt.⁴² Allerdings sind damit nicht zwei Bereiche dualistischer Substanzen eröffnet; die Parallelität entspringt vielmehr aus dem Gesamtzusammenhang der Monaden. Besonders in Bezug auf das Leib-Seele-Problem macht Leibniz deutlich, dass das Verhältnis zwischen höheren, apperzeptiven Monaden und deren kleinsten Perzeptionen aufzuschlüsseln ist. Seine universale Harmonie ist auch die Absage an einen kartesischen Dualismus.⁴³ Die kausale Geschlossenheit der Welt mag also gegeben sein, sie ist gegenüber dem Telos des göttlichen Entscheidungswillens, der den Gesamtzusammenhang der Möglichkeiten fügt, letztlich sekundär. Diese Auslegung von Leibniz' Gedanken spielte in Nietzsches, besonders aber Musils akademischem Umfeld eine wichtige Rolle. Im neukantianischen Klima und vor dem Hintergrund der Reanimation des psychophysischen Parallelismus in der Psychologie wurde Leibniz' Philosophie rehabilitiert und bereits kritisch modifiziert.⁴⁴

Das primäre Telos des göttlichen Willens entspringt für Leibniz also nicht den in einer göttlichen Ordnung vorausgesetzten höheren

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² Vgl. Leibniz, *Theodizee*, § 18 u. 74.

⁴³ Vgl. zu einer Darstellung, die den Gottes-Begriff fokussiert: Martin Carrier-Jürgen Mittelstraß, *Geist, Gehirn, Verhalten: Das Leib-Seele-Problem und die Philosophie der Psychologie* (Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 1989), 25-27.

⁴⁴ Vgl. etwa Helmut Holzhey, „Die Leibniz-Rezeption im «Neukantianismus» der Marburger Schule,“ in *Beiträge zur Wirkungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Studia Leibnitiana Bd. 26*, Hrg. Albert Heinekamp (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1986), 289-300. Vgl. Carl Stumpf, *Leib und Seele. Der Entwicklungsgedanke in der gegenwärtigen Philosophie. Zwei Reden* (Leipzig: Barth, 1909). Vgl. Christoph Sebastian Widdau, „Cassirers Leibnizrezeption und die Leibnizforschung,“ in *Symbol und Leben: Grundlinien einer Philosophie der Kultur und Gesellschaft, Festschrift für Christian Möckel*, Hrg. Pellegrino Favuzzi et al., (Berlin: Logos, 2017), 61-72. Vgl. Wilhelm Wundt, „Ueber psychische Causalität und das Princip des psycho-physischen Parallelismus“, in *Philosophische Studien*, Band 10 (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1894).

Zwecken, sondern dem Umstand, dass sich der göttliche Wille frei selbst ergreift, als praktische, zwecksetzende Vernunft.⁴⁵ Die Priorität des freien Willen Gottes vor der kausalen Determiniertheit der Physis weist Leibniz sodann auch als einen wissenschaftstheoretischen Punkt aus. Er legt sie als eine These zur Welt, als durch die menschliche Erkenntnis erfasste Welt aus: „Man kann – das leugne ich nicht – die Besonderheit der Natur rein mechanisch erklären, jedoch erst nachdem man die *Prinzipien* der Mechanik selbst anerkennt oder vorausgesetzt hat.“⁴⁶ Und genau dieser primäre Setzungsakt ist eine freie Tat des menschlichen Vermögens, die nicht in den daraufhin aufgestellten kausalmechanischen Prozess auflösbar ist.

Dieser Punkt wird von Kant aufgenommen – auch wenn für ihn jetzt die newtonsche Mechanik in unseren apriorischen Erfahrungsapparat eingeschrieben ist:

Einem jeden Vermögen des Gemüts kann man ein Interesse beilegen, d. i. ein Prinzip, welches die Bedingung enthält, unter welcher allein die Ausübung desselben befördert wird. Die Vernunft, als das Vermögen der Prinzipien, bestimmt das Interesse aller Gemütskräfte, das ihrige aber sich selbst.⁴⁷

Darin deutet sich die ethische Dimension an, die durch das praktische Fundament der reinen Vernunft ausgesprochen ist.

In der Verbindung also der reinen spekulativen mit der reinen praktischen Vernunft zu einem Erkenntnis führt die letztere das *Primat*, vorausgesetzt nämlich, daß diese Verbindung nicht etwa *zufällig* und beliebig, sondern a priori auf der Vernunft selbst gegründet, mithin *notwendig* sei. [...], weil alles Interesse zuletzt praktisch ist, und selbst das der spekulativen Vernunft nur bedingt und im praktischen Gebrauche allein vollständig ist.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Vgl. Manfred Kugelstadt, „Überlegungen zu Leibniz' Gottesbegriff: Die «Urmonade» zwischen Vernunft- und Offenbarungsreligion,“ in *Wozu Offenbarung?: Zur philosophischen und theologischen Begründung von Religion*, Hrg. Bernd Dörflinger, Gerhard Krieger, Manfred Scheuer (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006), 133.

⁴⁶ Leibniz, „Aus dem Briefwechsel zwischen Leibniz und Arnauld,“ in *Hauptschriften zur Grundlegung der Philosophie Teil II: Schriften zur Monadenlehre und zur Ethik und Rechtsphilosophie*, Hrg. Ernst Cassirer, übersetzt v. Artur Buchenau (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1996), 419.

⁴⁷ Immanuel Kant, „Kritik der praktischen Vernunft,“ in *Die Werke Immanuel Kants, Band VII*, Hrg. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1974), A 216.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, A 219.

Das menschliche Vermögen, normative Voraussetzungen für unser theoretisches Interesse an empirisch überprüfbaren Zusammenhängen aufzustellen, zu reflektieren und damit selbst zu überprüfen, spiegelt für Leibniz noch Gottes freien Willen wider.

Dass sie aber nicht primär kausal verursacht sind, bedeutet nicht, dass die Ereignisse grundlos sind; auch jedes kontingente Geschehen ist im Wirken Gottes durch das Prinzip des zureichenden Grundes bestimmt. Gott entscheidet frei, ist aber nicht irrational. Damit ist ein kritischer Punkt des Idealismus gemacht, der bei Kant voll zur Geltung kommt: Das Praktische ist primär.⁴⁹ Kein theoretisches Wissen kann uns erklären, dass wir auch als erfahrende und denkende Wesen Handelnde sind – und das auch, wenn wir über unser Handeln nachdenken. Bei Leibniz bedeutet das noch das Primat der göttlichen Praxis. Der umfassende Blick Gottes erscheint darin als das „Ideal *einer* Natur und der durchgängigen *Möglichkeit ihrer Erkenntnis*“, und der große, *eine* Gott vermag als „hypostasierter und ins Unendliche verlängerter Inbegriff unserer selbst und unserer sämtlichen Gemütsvermögen (hier vornehmlich unseres Verstandes)“ sichtbar zu werden.⁵⁰ Diese Hypostasierung unserer Gemütsvermögen im Gottesbild vollzieht sich auch und vor allem auf der praktischen Ebene, wo wir das Problem des Bösen konfrontieren. Weil vernunftbegabte Wesen hoffen können, ihr Handeln Gottes Willen gemäß auszurichten, können sie gegen das Böse agieren, müssen aber vor allem auf es reagieren und es deuten.

Dieses Verständnis von der praktischen Auseinandersetzung der Menschen mit dem Bösen vereint bei Leibniz zwei widersprüchlich erscheinende Tendenzen, wenn er darin Freiheit und Schicksal unter dem christlichen Weltbild zusammen denken kann. Überraschenderweise schreiben Nietzsche und Musil nicht die neuzeitliche Tendenz fort, die mit der Freiheit vernunftbegabter Wesen ins Spiel kommt. Vielmehr ist auch ihr Böses eines, an dem Menschen leiden, auf das sie reagieren und das sie deuten müssen. Es existiert, auch wenn seine Ausführung oder Verhinderung gar nicht in menschlicher Hand liegt, deswegen bleibt es

⁴⁹ Freilich vollzieht sich das bei Kant vor der Trennung von Natur- und Sittengesetz, sowie vor einer Einengung des Praxisbegriffs. Nietzsche und Musil müssen sich auch damit auseinandersetzen, insofern sie Leibniz teleologische Lösung nicht übernehmen. Das kann ich in diesem Rahmen nicht zum Thema machen. Allerdings kann ihr veränderter Blick auf das Böse schon darin deutlich werden, dass sie an dieses Primat anknüpfen, ihnen aber das Paradigma der Vernunft abhandenkommt.

⁵⁰ Kugelstadt, „Überlegungen zu Leibniz' Gottesbegriff“, 131.

im Schicksal und Fatum verwoben. Um diese beiden Tendenzen schärfer voneinander abgrenzen zu können, soll die Anthropozentrierung des Bösen, an die Nietzsche und Musil in solch ambivalenter Weise anknüpfen, weiterverfolgt werden.

V. Von Leibniz' zu Kants Anthropozentrierung des Bösen

Auf den ersten Blick muss Kants Erörterung des Bösen im Gegensatz zu Nietzsche und Musil noch selbstverständlicher von christlichen Voraussetzungen ausgehen können. Und sie knüpft tatsächlich auch an Leibniz an. In seiner *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* postuliert Kant die Unsterblichkeit der Seele und den Glauben an einen guten Gott.⁵¹ Eine der göttlichen Weisheit ideal entsprechende Welt ist für ihn nicht mehr in jedem Augenblick verwirklicht; vielmehr wird das Telos dieser absoluten Vernunft, das jetzt zudem das Telos der Aufklärung ist, in eine Zukunft versetzt, an deren historischer Hervorarbeitung die Menschen teilhaben, weil sie als unsterbliche Seelen die Ausführenden dieser göttlichen Praxis sind. Diese Modifikation von Leibniz' Gedanken der besten aller möglichen Welten macht Kant zum Beginn seiner Postulatenlehre, wenn er sich fragt, auf welches Ziel unser moralisches Handeln nur ausgerichtet sein kann.⁵² Eine Welt, in der alle glücklich sind, wie eine Welt, in der alle moralisch handeln, kann dieses Ziel für ihn nicht sein, weil wir wissen, dass moralisches Handeln nicht unbedingt mit Glück verbunden ist.⁵³ Und so wären im ersten Fall sehr unmoralische Menschen vollkommen glücklich und im zweiten könnten vollkommen moralische Menschen sehr unglücklich sein. Dieser Zielvorstellung entspricht also eine Welt, in der allen Menschen genau so viel Glück zugeteilt ist, wie es ihnen durch ihr moralisches Handeln vergönnt ist. Dieses Fernziel ethischer Praxis kann aber für Kant nur vor der Vorstellung der Unsterblichkeit unserer Seelen und einem richtenden Gott Bestand haben. Denn wer sonst soll das Glück zuteilen. Wer soll mit dieser Verteilungsmacht auftreten können?

Das ist vor dem Hintergrund des vorherbestimmenden Gottes zugespitzt, der in einer fernen, zu erreichenden Zukunft Glückseligkeit und Glückswürdigkeit in eindeutige Beziehung bringen kann. Doch

⁵¹ Kant, „Kp V“, A 220-38.

⁵² Vgl. *Ibidem*, A 198-205, 239-41.

⁵³ Vgl. *Ibidem*, A 225, A 231.

ist es bereits das Ziel jedes aktuellen moralischen Handelns, sich dieser „Würdigkeit, glücklich zu sein“, ⁵⁴ vor dem Gerichtshof des eigenen Gewissens zu erweisen. So

bleibt für Kant [...] die durch das Christentum vermittelte Hoffnung auf eine Glückseligkeit in einer nachgeschichtlichen Zukunft [...] nur dann eine vernünftige Hoffnung, wenn der Mensch sich dieser Glückseligkeit zuvor durch sein Handeln würdig erwiesen hat. ⁵⁵

Das bedeutet nun nicht, nach Klugheitsüberlegungen das eigene Glück anzustreben, sondern die Pflicht zu erfüllen. Diese moralische Würde steht unter dem Urteil der eigenen, partei- und interessenlos richtenden Vernunft. Und diese betrifft das freie, selbstbestimmte Handeln jedes einzelnen Menschen. Damit löst sich die praktische Vernunft aus dem göttlichen Plan für das individuelle Handeln. *Non datur fatum*; es gibt kein Schicksal. ⁵⁶ Gott bleibt nominell Herrscher im Reich des Moralischen, verliert aber die metaphysische Macht über die Handlungs- und Lebensmöglichkeiten der Menschen. Diese Macht bleibt dem Gott des *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* noch und Musil und Nietzsche halten an dem Schicksal fest, das hier verabschiedet wird.

Die Anthropozentrierung des Bösen setzt sich bei Kant fort, geht aber einher mit einer Fixierung des Menschenbildes, die einer solchen Betrachtung des Bösen und unserem Reden über Moral überhaupt vorausgesetzt werden muss. Sie rückt bei Kant die Menschen als freie Vernunftwesen in den Fokus, es ist also eine Zentrierung auf bestimmte Begriffe von menschlicher Freiheit und menschlicher Vernunft.

Die Fokussierung der Freiheit des Vernunftwesens Mensch bedeutet auch, dass die Neigungen und Triebe, die Schwächen des Fleisches, als natürliche Determinanten, gar nicht den Grund für das moralische Phänomen des Bösen abgeben können. „Mithin kann in keinem die Willkür durch Neigung *bestimmenden* Objekte, in keinem Naturtriebe,

⁵⁴ Immanuel Kant, „Kritik der reinen Vernunft I,“ in *Die Werke Immanuel Kants, Band III*, Hrg. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1974), A 806/B 834, vgl. A 808/B, 836-37.

⁵⁵ Willi Oelmüller, „Das Böse“ in *Handbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe, Band 1*, Hrg. Hermann Krings, Hans Michael Baumgartner, Christoph Wild (München: Kösel, 1973), 260-61. Vgl. zu „Kants Kritik der seit *Leibniz* entwickelten Theodizeeprozesse“: *Ibidem*, 259.

⁵⁶ Vgl. Oswald Schwemmer, „Schicksal,“ in *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie, Band 3*, Hrg. Jürgen Mittelstraß (Stuttgart-Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2004), 700.

sondern nur in einer Regel, die die Willkür sich selbst für den Gebrauch ihrer Freiheit macht, d. i. in einer Maxime, der Grund des Bösen liegen.“⁵⁷ Leibniz konnte das Bild des schwachen Fleisches noch zur Illustration seines Bösen verwenden, da Gottes Wille durch die Koordination auch der kleinsten und dunklen Perzeptionen, die rational unverfügbar bleiben, seine moralische Ordnung in der besten aller möglichen Welten zum Ausdruck bringt.⁵⁸ Auch Kant erscheint das Böse mit der Natur des Menschen verwoben „und zwar allgemein als Mensch, mithin so, daß er durch dieselbe zugleich den Charakter seiner Gattung ausdrückt“.⁵⁹ Diesen passiven, aus der Begrenzung der menschlichen Natur stammenden Charakter des Bösen, der in Leibniz metaphysischer Variante zum Ausdruck kommt und durch die physikalische Trägheit illustriert wird, muss auch Kant adressieren. Dazu entwickelt er den komplexen Gedanken des menschlichen Hangs zum Bösen, der in Einklang zu bringen versucht, dass es zur menschlichen Gattung gehört, aber nicht das Naturwesen Mensch betreffen kann, sondern nur das freie Vernunftwesen, welches als solches allerdings unter dem Sittengesetz steht, gegenüber dem das Böse „als Mißbrauch der Willkür“ konnotiert wird.⁶⁰

Aller Hang ist entweder physisch, d. i. er gehört zur Willkür des Menschen als Naturwesen; oder er ist moralisch, d. i. zur Willkür desselben als moralischen Wesens gehörig. – Im ersteren Sinne gibt es keinen Hang zum moralisch Bösen; denn dieses muß aus der Freiheit entspringen [...] Nun ist aber nichts sittlich- (d. i. zurechnungsfähig-) böse, als was unsere eigene *Tat* ist. Dagegen versteht man unter dem Begriffe eines Hanges einen subjektiven Bestimmungsgrund der Willkür, der *vor jeder Tat vorhergeht*, mithin selbst noch nicht *Tat* ist; da denn in dem Begriffe eines bloßen Hanges zum Bösen ein Widerspruch sein würde, wenn dieser Ausdruck nicht etwa in zweierlei verschiedener Bedeutung, die sich beide doch mit dem Begriffe der Freiheit vereinigen lassen, genommen werden könnte.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Kant, „Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft (RGV),“ in *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, Hrg. von der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften [=AA]. (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1900ff.), AA, VI, 21. Vgl. *Ibidem*, 34-35.

⁵⁸ Vgl. Leibniz, *Theodizee*, § 31. Vgl. idem, *Monadologie*, in *Monadologie und andere metaphysische Schriften*, Französisch-Deutsch, Hrg. Ernst Cassirer, übersetzt v. Artur Buchenau (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2002), 135-188, 110-151, § 20-24.

⁵⁹ Kant, „RGV,“ AA VI 21.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, AA VI 31.

Dieser Hang kann dann noch als Tat, als „Gebrauch der Freiheit gelten, wodurch die oberste Maxime (dem Gesetze gemäß oder zuwider) in die Willkür aufgenommen“ ist. Sie ist dann als eine „intelligibele Tat, bloß durch Vernunft ohne alle Zeitbedingung erkennbar“.⁶² Wie das Böse als Unvollkommenheit des Menschen für Leibniz vor aller Sünde besteht, so ist diese „eigene Tat“⁶³ des Menschen „vor aller Erfahrung“.⁶⁴ Damit löst Kant diesen Widerspruch in der Beziehung des Bösen auf die menschliche Gattung auf.⁶⁵ Selbst dieser passiv erscheinende Hang muss im moralischen Hang zum Bösen als Tat gedacht werden. Das Böse muss zurechenbar sein. Der göttliche Wille, der den Individuen durch ihr Schicksal moralische Orientierung gibt, wird abgelöst durch den guten Willen nach der Maßgabe reiner Vernunft.

VI. Nietzsches und Musils Absage an die Allmacht der Vernunft

Auch Leibniz glaubt, dass wir zu vernünftigen Einsichten über unser moralisch richtiges Handeln gelangen können. Aber als moralische Subjekte sind auch diese Vernunftwesen durch einen göttlichen Willen konstituiert, dessen Weisheit ihnen nie voll einsichtig werden kann. Die normative Ordnung ist allerdings allein von ihm abhängig. Genau da, wo Leibniz' Gottesbild modern ist und er sich auf dem Weg zu einer Ethik macht, die in einem Sittengesetz freier Vernunftwesen verankert ist, wenden sich Nietzsche und Musil interessanterweise ab. Das wird immer dann anschaulich, wenn sie zugleich konstruktiv an seine Philosophie anknüpfen. Wenn Nietzsche zugibt, dass das *Fatum* das menschliche Leben vorherbestimmt, entfaltet er zugleich seine ganze Polemik gegen den Gott der Vernunft.

Aber im Grunde von uns, ganz „da unten“, giebt es freilich etwas Unbelehrbares, einen Granit von geistigem *Fatum*, von vorherbestimmter Entscheidung und Antwort auf vorherbestimmte ausgelesene

⁶² *Ibidem*, AA VI 32.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, AA VI 31.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, AA VI 39.

⁶⁵ Vgl. *Ibidem*, AA VI 21: „Wenn wir also sagen: der Mensch ist von Natur gut, oder, er ist von Natur böse: so bedeutet dieses nur so viel, als: er enthält einen (uns unerforschlichen) ersten Grund der Annehmung guter, oder der Annehmung böser (gesetzwidriger) Maximen; und zwar allgemein als Mensch, mithin so, daß er durch dieselbe zugleich den Charakter seiner Gattung ausdrückt.“ Vgl. zu den Schwierigkeiten dieser Auflösung: Oelmüller, „Das Böse“, 259.

Fragen. Bei jedem kardinalen Probleme redet ein unwandelbares „das bin ich“.⁶⁶

Zwar sind die „Überzeugungen“ genauso „nur Fusstapfen zur Selbsterkenntnis, Wegweiser zum Probleme, das wir sind“, also Elemente der moralischen Einheit der Subjekte und der Kriterien für das Böse in der Welt; jedoch erscheinen diese nicht als die moralischen Fingerzeige der göttlichen Dekrete, sondern führen „zur grossen Dummheit, die wir sind, zu unserem geistigen *Fatum*, zum Unbelehrbaren ganz «da unten»“.⁶⁷ Dabei unterstreicht Nietzsche „wie sehr es eben nur — meine Wahrheiten sind“, die dieses *Fatum* konstituieren;⁶⁸ was jetzt nicht mehr nur heißt, dass jede Monade die Unendlichkeit aus ihrer ganz bestimmten Perspektive spiegelt, sondern dass die hypostasierte Gesamtperspektive, das omnipräsenze Auge Gottes, abgeschafft ist. Noch für Leibniz steht diese allumfassende, göttliche Perspektive dafür, dass sich ein individuelles Schicksal über die Frage nach seiner Übereinstimmung mit dem Guten und Gerechten nach Vernunftgründen moralisch bestimmen lässt, welche dann nicht bloß „meine Wahrheiten“ in Nietzsches Sinne sein dürfen.

In Musils Gegenprojekten stellt sich die offensichtliche Differenz zu Leibniz darin dar, dass keine notwendige Ordnung im Weltlauf zu erkennen ist und er vielmehr als unvollkommen und ziellos beschreiben wird.⁶⁹ Sein Gott schert sich nur um den Mittelwert, der bloß die unzureichenden Gründe menschlichen Daseins anzugeben vermag. Wichtig scheint hier einzusehen, dass die beiden Moralkritiker damit keinesfalls primär den Gottesbegriff treffen wollen, um das Problem des Bösen für obsolet zu erklären. Vielmehr richten sie sich gegen das ethische Fundament, das auch nach dem atheistischen Impuls der Aufklärung noch das Böse in der Welt zu legitimieren imstande war: die Vernunft. Es ist also ein ganz bestimmtes, durch die europäische Ideengeschichte tradiertes Bild von Gott und vor allem ein damit verknüpftes Modell von freiem, ethischen Handeln, das sie damit ablehnen.

⁶⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, „Jenseits von Gut und Böse“, in *Kritische Studienausgabe: Band 5*, Hrg. Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari (München-Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), Aph. 231.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹ Vgl. Musil, KA, Blaue Mappe/74 (1933-1934).

Als allmächtige und auch praktische Vernunft wird Leibniz' Gott tatsächlich zum Gott der Neuzeit, der in Kants Zerstörung aller klassischen Gottesbeweise von seinen metaphysischen Schlacken befreit scheint, wenn er meint, dass „das christliche Prinzip der Moral selbst doch nicht theologisch [...], sondern Autonomie der reinen praktischen Vernunft für sich selbst“ sei.⁷⁰ Schon der rational mit dem zureichenden Grund operierenden Wille von Leibniz' Schöpfer ist freie, praktische Vernunft. Wenn sich in seiner Hervorhebung der individuellen Substanz, „die jenes «Ich» auszusprechen vermag“,⁷¹ sowie in seiner Abgrenzung des Reichs der Gnade bereits der Weg von Leibniz zu Kant andeutet, so ist dieser Weg doch auch vom Zusammenbruch der Legitimität moralischer Normen gezeichnet, welche, religiös und institutionell installiert, Stabilität gewährleisteten. Verliert dabei das Reden vom Ethischen seine Kontexte,⁷² zeigt sich dann aber zugleich, dass auch in der ethischen Tradition unter christlichem Weltbild ein neuer Rahmen zur Absicherung des Reichs des Sittlichen bereitstand: die Fähigkeit der Ratio zu klarer und sicherer Einsicht. Für Leibniz und Kant ist Gott bereits die Allmacht der Vernunft. Wie die erfahrbare Welt der Natur so eingerichtet ist, dass wir ihr Erkenntnisse abringen können, so ist die moralische Welt von Gott so organisiert, dass ihre Werte unser Handeln seinem Willen entsprechend leiten können. Eben diesen Kontext aber zum Fundament der Ethik zu machen, wurde nicht selten als Verlust empfunden. Deutlich wird das etwa im Spinozismus-Streit. Nicht zufällig traf und trifft der Vorwurf des Atheismus noch Leibniz und Kant. Nietzsches Genealogie beschreibt gerade, wie der Wille zum Wissen und zur Wahrheit aus den Idealen des Christentums geboren, sich gegen es selbst wendet. Er will nicht bloß daran partizipieren, sondern noch diesen Willen und die der Ideengeschichte eingeschriebene Vernunft überwinden.

An Nietzsches Jenseits des Bösen und in Anschluss daran in Musils thermodynamischem Erhaltungssatz des Bösen lässt sich dann in diesem abgegrenzten Teilbereich präzisieren, wie ihre ethischen Projekte, als Umwertung der Werte und Ausnahmemoral des anderen Zustands,

⁷⁰ Kant, „Kp V,“ A 232.

⁷¹ Leibniz, *Metaphysische Abhandlung*, in *Hauptschriften zur Grundlegung der Philosophie Teil II*, Hrg. Ernst Cassirer, übersetzt v. Artur Buchenau (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1966), 135-188, § 34.

⁷² Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 59-62.

so gefasst werden können, dass die Radikalität ihrer Moralkritik nicht das letzte Wort sein muss. Vielmehr vermag sich daran zu zeigen, wie sie zwar kritisch, aber konstruktiv an die ethische Tradition anschließen, mit der sie abrechnen wollen. Als Frage nach dem Bösen vor den veränderten Bedingungen des modernen Lebens, können diese ethischen Entwürfe auch noch aktuell Bedeutung für uns beanspruchen, wenn damit keinesfalls die Drastik ihrer Kritik geteilt werden muss. Leibniz' Moralphilosophie schien vor den religiösen und sittlichen Einbindungen des Individuums gerechtfertigt und Kant beansprucht bloß den Menschen, der sich von diesen institutionellen Schranken zum Gebrauch seines eigenen Verstandes erhebt. Nietzsches und Musils Frage nach dem Bösen hat es schlicht mit anderen Bedingungen zu tun, sodass sich tradierte Lösungsansätze als obsolet und sogar als problematisch das neue Böse bedingend herausstellen können.

VII. Nietzsches und Musils Umdeutung der praktische Bewältigung des Bösen

Nietzsche und Musil bewahren also das Schicksal, weil sie an den Zug von Leibniz' Handlungsmodell anknüpfen, der das Böse nicht ganz auf die Schultern des freien Vernunftwesens Mensch abwerfen will. Gott wird für Leibniz bereits die Allmacht der Vernunft. Sein Wille ist freie, zwecksetzende Vernunft. Durch das Vermögen der rationalen Einsicht in Gottes Ordnung reduziert sich die Distanz, die mit dem metaphysischen Bösen zwischen Gott und seinen Geschöpfen klafft, und Leibniz bezeichnet diese besonders befähigten Monaden als „kleine Götter“.⁷³ Die moralische Ordnung bleibt aber vom Willen Gottes abhängig, dessen Erfüllung einzig als Tat reiner praktischer Vernunft gelten kann, weil „das Handeln Gottes allein rein und ohne Mischung dessen ist, was man Leiden nennt“.⁷⁴ Menschliches Handeln ist auch immer Leiden; dieses traditionsreiche Praxismodell drückt Leibniz in der Abhängigkeit des moralischen Subjekts von seinem gottgegebenen Schicksal aus.

Kants Praxismodell muss ein anderes sein, soll die Betrachtung der Moral autonom auf der praktischen Vernunft des Menschen aufbauen. Schließlich „sucht Kant einen theoretischen Bezugsrahmen zur Deutung der Unmenschlichkeit des Menschen, der [...] von dem Gebrauch der

⁷³ Leibniz, *Monadologie*, § 83. Idem, *Theodizee*, § 147.

⁷⁴ Leibniz, *Theodizee*, § 32.

Freiheit und Vernunft aus entwickelt ist“.⁷⁵ Der Hang zum Bösen betrifft nicht die Individuen, sondern den Menschen als Gattungswesen, muss aber als Tat zurechenbar sein. Selbst vor aller Erfahrung sind die um Selbstbetrug nicht verlegenen Menschen befähigt, eine dem Sittengesetz widersprechende, obersten Maxime frei zu wählen. Es ist nicht mehr der Mangel gegenüber der göttlichen Vollkommenheit, sondern der Mangel gegenüber dem Sittengesetz der reinen Vernunft, der das Böse auszeichnet. Damit wird „das Böse weder von den Prämissen der jüdisch-christlichen Schöpfungs- und Erlösungslehre aus [...] noch von den Prämissen der überlieferten Ontologie aus“ ausgelegt.⁷⁶ Es ist „keine Negation des Göttlichen und des Seins, sondern eine durch das Handeln des Menschen selbstverschuldete Negation des Menschlichen“.⁷⁷ Mit Kants Anthropozentrierung des Bösen durch ein Menschenbild, welches unter normativen Voraussetzungen steht,⁷⁸ wird es auch auf ein bestimmtes Verständnis von Praxis reduziert. Das Böse drücken dann nur Handlungen aus, die in einer selbstbestimmten Beziehung zu einer Norm stehen.

Das Böse des Ersten Weltkriegs etwa lässt sich in Musils Reflexionen allerdings nicht durch die Klärung individueller Urheberchaft bewältigen:

Wie falsch, die leider oft in Deutschland zu hörende Schulbubenausrede:
Wir haben's nicht getan! Sondern die Kaiser, die Generäle, die
Diplomaten! Natürlich haben wir's getan: wir haben es gewähren las-
sen; es hat es getan, ohne daß es von uns gehindert worden wäre.⁷⁹

Kant unterscheidet zwischen dem, „was unmittelbar in unserer Gewalt ist, und dann zweitens [...] dem, was uns Vernunft, als Ergänzung unseres Unvermögens, zur Möglichkeit des höchsten Guts (nach praktischen Prinzipien notwendig) darbietet und nicht in unserer Gewalt

⁷⁵ Oelmüller, „Das Böse“, 258.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, 257.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁸ Vgl. zu den anthropologischen Unterstellungen von Kants Sittengesetz: Oswald Schwemmer, „Imperativ, kategorischer,“ in *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie*, Band 2, Hrg. Jürgen Mittelstraß (Stuttgart-Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2004), 207. Vgl. Gerhard Gamm, „Zu Kants Idee einer praktischen Vernunft,“ in *Praktische Philosophie/Ethik. Aktuelle Materialien*, Band 1, Hrg. Karl-Otto Apel et al, (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1980), 185. Vgl. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Kritik der postkolonialen Vernunft: hin zu einer Geschichte der verrinnenden Gegenwart, Hrg. Andreas Nehring (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2014), 52-53.

⁷⁹ Musil, „Die Nation als Ideal und als Wirklichkeit,“ in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 8, Hrg. Adolf Frisé (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1978), 1062.

ist“.⁸⁰ Für Nietzsche und Musil ist der Bereich der Verantwortung unserer individuellen Taten gar nicht mehr so klar abzugrenzen, weil die moralisch schwerwiegenden Erfahrungen der Zeit sich gerade in diesem Zwischenbereich abspielen, der nach einer neuen Verhältnisbestimmung von individuellem Handeln und kollektiv geteilten Werten verlangt.

Durch diese zur Virtuosität ausgebildete ‚Indirektheit‘ wird heute das gute Gewissen jedes Einzelnen wie der ganzen Gesellschaft gesichert; der Knopf, auf den man drückt, ist immer weiß und schön, und was am anderen Ende der Leitung geschieht, geht andere Leute an, die für ihre Person wieder nicht drücken.⁸¹

Für das an Nietzsche und Musil durch Leibniz' Schicksal überlieferte Verständnis von Praxis kann individuelles, menschliches Handeln nie als alleinige Ursache des Bösen isoliert sein. Für Menschen gibt es kein Handeln ohne Voraussetzungen, Bedingungen und Schranken. Sie können das Böse konfrontieren, indem sie am göttlichen Handeln teilhaben, und doch bleibt es unverständlich eingebunden im dia- und synchronen Gesamtzusammenhang, den nur dieser einzig rein vernünftige und freie, göttliche Wille kontrolliert und damit noch die moralische Identität der handelnden Menschen selbst hervorbringt.⁸² Wenn Nietzsche und Musil am Schicksal von Leibniz festhalten, wenden sie ein, dass der Beziehung des menschlichen Handelns zum Bösen noch dieser passive, kreatürliche Zug zu eigen ist, der für das ethische Handlungsmodell Kants mit der Verabschiedung des Schicksals verloren scheint. Moralische Identität reduziert sich nicht auf das freie Vernunftwesen Mensch, sondern betrifft den Menschen auch in den erlittenen Voraussetzungen seines Handelns, welche nicht in seiner Hand liegen, als spezifisches historisches, soziales und kulturelles Subjekt. Menschliches Handeln hat auch dann eine moralische Dimension, wenn es sich nur in Teilmomenten übergeordneter Prozesse darstellt, die nicht beeinflussbar oder einsehbar sind und darüber hinaus das moralische Selbstverständnis der Menschen auch hinter ihrem Rücken prägen. Nietzsche und Musil wollen eine weitere Verantwortung einfordern,⁸³ die sich gerade auf Handlungen bezieht, an denen niemand und alle Schuld sind. Wenn sich darin die „Lehre von

⁸⁰ Kant, „Kp V“, A 215.

⁸¹ Musil, MoE, 638.

⁸² Vgl. Leibniz, *Theodizee*, § 32. Vgl. idem, *Monadologie*, § 88-90.

⁸³ Vgl. Musil, MoE, 599, 636, 1212. Vgl. Nietzsche, „Jenseits von Gut und Böse“, Aph. 61, 203, 212.

der *völligen Unverantwortlichkeit* und Unschuld Jedermannes“ zugleich als die „Lehre von der völligen Verantwortlichkeit und Verschuldung Jedermannes“ darstellt, ist damit „die weltliche Gerechtigkeit aus den Angeln zu heben“.⁸⁴

VIII. Nietzsche, Musil und das Böse des modernen Lebens

Indem Musil den Gott am Leben lässt, dem durch Nietzsches Tod Gottes aber nachhaltig der normativ zentrale Aspekt seiner metaphysischen Rolle entzogen ist, betont er, dass diese neue Perspektive auf ethische Praxis von einem alten Bild der Abhängigkeit des menschlichen Handelns inspiriert ist. Das moralische Subjekt ist durch eine Macht, das heißt durch eine dem Individuum selbst unverfügbare und vorgängige Praxis konstituiert, die Musil noch als göttliche aussprechen kann; auch wenn dieser dann der Gott des Mittelwerts ist, der sich um die Individuen nicht mehr kümmert.⁸⁵

Noch Nietzsches und Musils Denken lässt sich im Zeichen dieses Primat der Praxis lesen. Im Gegensatz zu Leibniz und Kant kann ihnen Praxis aber nicht reine praktische Vernunft sein. Mit Leibniz, aber gegen Kant, vollzieht ihr Praxisbegriff nicht den Schritt zum fundamental *begründenden* Subjekt mit. Leibniz moralisches Subjekt bleibt ein primär von Gottes Operieren mit dem Satz des zureichenden Grundes *begründetes*. Praxis ist nicht nur das Tun der Individuen, als moralische Wesen, sondern auch der Zusammenhang aller Praktiken und damit ein externer Praxiszusammenhang, der die Individuen erst als moralische Akteure konstituiert. Für Leibniz ist es das Wollen und Handeln Gottes, für Musil und Nietzsche ist es die Macht der Geschichte, die über unabsehbar verflochtene Praxiszusammenhänge das individuelle Subjekt in seinen Handlungsmöglichkeiten erst hervorbringt. Wie für Leibniz das

⁸⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, „Menschliches, Allzumenschliches II,“ in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Band 2, Hrg. Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari (München-Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), Aph. 81.

⁸⁵ Vgl. Musil, MoE, 491. Das Primat der göttlichen Praxis bedeutet schon für Leibniz das der praktischen Vernunft. Dass das göttliche Wissen demgegenüber umfassender und vorgängig ist, kann Leibniz' idealistische Metaphysik nicht naturalistisch bedrohen, da ihm auch Naturgesetze zu den kontingenten Auswirkungen des göttlichen Willens gehören, welche in einer anderen Welt ganz anders sein könnten; sie sind keine notwendigen Wahrheiten. Kant wird den primären Bereich des Praktischen schärfer abgrenzen müssen, da seiner Konzeption von theoretischer Vernunft die Gesetzmäßigkeiten der newtonschen Mechanik notwendig eingeschrieben sind. Das Primat beruht für ihn allein auf der praktischen Vernunft des individuellen, autonomen Subjekts.

moralische Subjekt durch Gottes Macht geschaffen ist, so ist für sie das praktisch autonome Subjekt durch die Macht der Geschichte in ihrem kontingenten Verlauf entstanden.⁸⁶

Wenn zwischen Leibniz' Reich der Gnade und Kants Reich des Sittengesetzes das Telos der praktischen Vernunft in göttliche und menschliche Vernunft auseinanderbricht, beziehen Musil und Nietzsche die Position von Leibniz, also die Position der göttlichen Vernunft. Indem diese göttliche Macht aber zur geschichtlichen Macht wird, ist sie allerdings nicht mehr die autoritäre Instanz, die alles Böse zu legitimieren vermag. Das bedeutet keinesfalls, dass sie mit ihrer Kritik des freien Willens das Böse externen Determinationsprozessen übergeben. Aber es bedeutet, dass sie einen weiteren Begriff von Verantwortung und Praxis fordern, der berücksichtigt, dass unser Handeln auch dann moralische Dimension hat, wenn es nicht von individuellen, rationalen Entscheidungen allein abhängt und sich nur in Momenten übergeordneter Praxiszusammenhänge darstellt, die nicht individuell kontrollierbar sind, sondern die Individuen selbst in ihrem moralischen Selbstverständnis prägen.

Im Verhältnis von allgemeiner Norm und individuellem Handeln erweist sich das Böse dort nicht mehr allein an der Entsprechung des Letzteren. Indem Normen in ihrer historischen Konstitution bewusst werden, kann nicht allein die Abweichung davon als das Böse auftreten. Vielmehr ist es die Beziehung zwischen Norm und Handeln, in der schon für Leibniz – jetzt genauso für Nietzsche und Musil – individuelle Subjektivität erst konstituiert wird, aber damit ebenso das Böse seine Inkarnation findet. Eben diese Beziehung ist für Leibniz Gottes Willen unterworfen, der die Einheit der Subjekte stiftet und seiner moralischen Grundordnung durchsetzt. Werden diese Funktionen nun als Leistungen einer historischen Entwicklung erkennbar, in der auch die Genesen unserer Erfahrungs- und Handlungsformen liegen, wird das Böse – nicht nur in seiner Legitimation, sondern auch in seiner Identifikation – wieder ganz neu zum Problem. Nicht das Böse, wie es sich Ausdruck verschafft und immer in Abhängigkeit von unserer Perspektive auftritt, sondern die Konstruktionsprozesse dieses Bösen geraten in den Blick.

Die erst darin genealogisch darstellbare Kritik richtet sich nun gegen ein Böses, das von der ethischen Tradition ignoriert scheint. Das Böse, das durch die Allmacht der Vernunft, egal ob durch Leibniz' metaphysisches

⁸⁶ Vgl. Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Aph. 354, 357. Vgl. Musil, *Tagebücher*, Hrg. Adolf Frisé (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1976), 453.

Übel oder das krumme Holz des kantischen Menschen⁸⁷, gerechtfertigt ist, steht damit zur Disposition. Und genau darin entwickeln sich Ansätze zu einer neuen Ethik. Schließlich lassen sich die Erfahrungen der Weltkriege und Genozide und noch die anhaltende Realität kolonialer oder patriarchaler Machtstrukturen mit einem solchen Verweis auf die notwendige Schlechtigkeit des Gesamtzusammenhangs der Welt oder die Unvollkommenheit der Menschen nicht abtun.

Auch für Nietzsche und Musil ist das Böse Element der sich geschichtlich entfaltenden, kollektiven Organisation unserer Lebensmöglichkeiten. Es zeigt sich jedoch nicht mehr primär darin, dass das Individuum mit Werten in Konflikt gerät, die es prinzipiell als universell verbindlich einsehen könnte. Vielmehr lässt sich das Problem des Bösen jetzt auf einer Ebene formulieren, auf der das Rationalitätsparadigma selbst hinterfragbar wird. Damit tun sich Zweifel auf, ob es eine rationale Methode gibt, welche die Kriterien für unser Handeln allgemein so zu statuieren imstande ist, dass sie zur Lösung aller konkreten Konflikte mit einem möglichen ethischen Bösen appliziert werden können. Die entscheidende, ethische Frage ist dann etwa nicht, wie wir ein Verbrechen verbindlich als ein solches identifizieren, sondern wie wir diese Rollen der Rechtmäßigen und der Delinquenten produzieren. Welche Sanktionierungssysteme wurden geschaffen, um diese Konstruktionen durchzusetzen? Wie verändern sie sich durch die Geschichte, in welche Dynamiken entfalten sie sich, um Rollen und Handlungsräume zu schaffen, in denen sich das Böse inkarniert? Welche Rollen repräsentieren das Böse und wie fließt unser ethisches Handeln in ihre soziale Konstitution ein? Welche Mittel stehen bestimmten Betroffenen überhaupt zur Verfügung, das ihnen widerfahrene Böse zu formulieren? Ist das Böse auf einer kollektiven Ebene zu fassen, wenn wir dort weder Verantwortung summativ fassen können, noch eine Ebene eröffnet ist, die von individueller Verantwortung freimachen könnte? Welche Kriterien, können in welcher Weise elaboriert werden, wenn sich nicht auf universale Werte zu stützen ist? Das sind nur einige wenige der neuen Fragen, die sich heute im Anschluss an Nietzsche und Musil an das Böse adressieren lassen, wenn wir es zu Lasten der Menschen gehen lassen, diese aber nicht auf individuell und autonom handelnde Vernunftwesen reduzieren.

⁸⁷ Vgl. etwa Immanuel Kant, „Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht,“ in *Was ist Aufklärung, Ausgewählte kleine Schriften*, Hrg. Horst Brandt (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1999), 10, AA VIII, 23.

Inkarnationen des Bösen im sozialistischen Denken

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From a Western, democratic perspective, the state socialism that existed until 1989 was criticised, not without justification, as an “evil empire” (Reagan). The Gulag, Pol Pot’s mass murders or Ceaușescu’s dictatorship show evident elements of evil in socialism. However, a different perspective is taken in the essay. From an internal hermeneutic perspective, it asks what forms of evil emerged within socialist thought. From a cultural-theoretical point of view, socialism is seen as a belief system and moral framework. Evil appears in this framework as (1) abstract evil, as (2) evil in others, and as (3) evil in oneself. These three figurations will be illuminated.

Keywords: Socialism, Communism, philosophy of evil, Marxism, antagonism, self-criticism, secular religion

1. Einstieg

Sozialismus ist in der öffentlichen wie wissenschaftlichen Debatte ein verbrannter Begriff. Zwar scheint er nicht ganz so für das Böse zu stehen wie sein Bruderbegriff Kommunismus,¹ doch als positiver politischer oder philosophischer Bezug scheint er, trotz diverser Wiederbelebungsversuche im akademischen Milieu,² (vorerst) ungeeignet zu haben. Die Realgeschichte

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¹ Exemplarisch für die Dokumentation der im Namen des Kommunismus begangenen Verbrechen vgl. Stéphane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartošek, Jean-Louis Margolin, Rémi Kauffer, Pierre Rigoulot, Pascal Fontaine, Yves Santamaria and Sylvain Boulouque, *Le livre noir du communisme – Crimes, terreur, répression* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1997); unter Berücksichtigung der brutalen Geschichte des Kommunismus hat Bini Adamczak 2004 ein inzwischen in 17 Sprachen übersetztes Plädoyer für ein kritisches Weiterdenken kommunistischer Motive veröffentlicht: Bini Adamczak, *Kommunismus. Kleine Geschichte wie endlich alles anders wird*, 4., überarbeitete Auflage (Münster: Unrast, 2017).

² Vgl. u.a.: Klaus Dörre, *Die Utopie des Sozialismus. Kompass für eine Nachhaltigkeitsrevolution* (Berlin: Matthes und Seitz, 2021); Smail Rapić, Hrg., *Naturphilosophie, Gesellschaftstheorie, Sozialismus. Zur Aktualität von Friedrich Engels* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022); Raul Zelik, *Wir Untoten des Kapitals. Über politische Monster und einen grünen Sozialismus* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2020) oder Kristen R. Ghodsee, *Warum Frauen im Sozialismus besseren Sex haben. Und andere Argumente für ökonomische Unabhängigkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019).

sich sozialistisch nennender Staatlichkeit hat die *Idee des Sozialismus*³ vorerst demontiert. Das letzte Wort ist freilich nicht gesprochen; die aktuell in Bewährung stehende Gesellschaftsform verschafft für viele (wiewohl nicht für alle) mehr Freiheit und materiellen Wohlstand als ehemals im Staatssozialismus, erodiert aber zusehends unter dem Eindruck der multiplen Krisen, mit denen die globalisierte Menschheit konfrontiert ist. Der *Glaube* an die Demokratie als Staatsform und den Kapitalismus als Wirtschaftsweise verliert an Gläubigen.⁴ Der Glaube an eine sozialistische oder kommunistische Gesellschaft hat seine Gläubigen schon lange verloren – nicht erst seit seinem de facto Zusammenbruch 1989/90.

Dennoch scheint mir die Beschäftigung mit diesem Glauben kein nur historisch interessantes Phänomen zu sein: Aus der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Sozialismus als sozialer Bewegung, die – dem Programm nach – auf die Verwirklichung von Emanzipation, Gleichberechtigung und Solidarität aus war, die das Ziel verfolgte, dass der Mensch kein „geknachtetes [...] Wesen“⁵ mehr sei, lässt sich auch für aktuelle politische Bewegungen und Fragestellungen politischer Theorie etwas lernen. Es ist eine pädagogische Binsenweisheit, dass man aus Fehlern lernt; und es mag ein wenig zynisch anmuten, diese Binse auch auf die Geschichte anzuwenden. Aber womöglich lässt sich aus dem Scheitern der sozialistischen Hoffnung an sich selbst – denn es waren keine äußeren Gegner, die den Sozialismus zu Fall gebracht haben, sondern seine eigene Korruption – etwas lernen über die Fallstricke, die sich soziale und politische Bewegungen, die sich Humanität auf die Fahne schreiben, selbst stellen.

Einer dieser Fallstricke scheint das Motiv des Bösen zu sein, das auf eine lange kulturgeschichtliche Tradition zurückgeht, aber in der sozialistischen Bewegung und in den sozialistischen Staaten je spezifische Aktualisierungen und Modifikationen erfuhr. Um Missverständnissen vorzubeugen: Es geht mir im Folgenden nicht darum, zu diskutieren, ob

³ Axel Honneth, *Die Idee des Sozialismus. Versuch einer Aktualisierung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015).

⁴ Dominique Reynié, hrsg., *Freedoms at Risk: The Challenge of the Century. A global survey on democracy in 55 countries* (Paris: Fondation pour l'innovation politique, 2022), <https://community-democracies.org/app/uploads/2022/01/fondapol-IRI-CoD-KAS-Genron-FNG-Rda-survey-freedoms-at-risk-the-challenge-of-the-century-01-2022.pdf>, accessed November 29, 2023.

⁵ Karl Marx, „Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. Einleitung,“ in *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels – Werke. Band 1* (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1981), 385.

oder inwiefern oder in welchem Ausmaß Böses im Namen des Sozialismus bzw. innerhalb sozialistischer Bewegungen, Parteien oder Staaten *began-gen* wurde (das ist evident und in all seinen Schrecken dokumentiert⁶). Mir geht es auch nicht um die Frage danach, was das Böse *eigentlich* ist. Vielmehr interessiert mich in einem ideengeschichtlichen Zugang die Frage, *wie innerhalb sozialistischen Denkens über das Böses gedacht wurde*. Also: Was erschien für Sozialistinnen und Sozialisten als das Böse im Rahmen eines sozialistischen Denk- und Glaubenssystems?

Hermeneutisch bleibe ich also in einer sozialistischen Binnenperspektive: Ich frage nach den Figuren des Bösen, die innerhalb sozialistischen Denkens aufgetaucht sind, und suche nach den Gründen und Folgen dieser Erscheinungsformen dieses sozialistischen Bösen. Leitend für meine Interpretation ist die These, dass der Sozialismus aus einer kulturtheoretischen Warte als säkulare Religion angesehen werden kann. Diese These wird im ersten Teil des Aufsatzes mit Bezug auf Erich Fromm und Mircea Eliade plausibilisiert, um danach den Begriff des Bösen, der für mich in diesem Aufsatz als Heuristik dient, zu konkretisieren. In den folgenden Abschnitten werde ich drei mir grundlegend erscheinende Figurationen des Bösen im Sozialismus rekonstruieren und thesenhaft kontextualisieren. Im Fazit skizziere ich weitergehenden Forschungsbedarf und mögliche Ansatzpunkte für eine kulturwissenschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit aktuellen sozialen Bewegungen und der Rolle, die Vorstellungen des Bösen in ihnen spielt.

2. Vorläufige begriffliche Setzungen

2.1. Sozialismus als Glaubenssystem

Der Sozialismus hat sich laut Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) im Laufe des 19. Jahrhunderts von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft entwickelt.⁷ Eine merkwürdige These, mag man heute einwenden. Ist der Sozialismus doch vor allem als soziale und politische Bewegung und nach 1917 dann auch als staatliches und ökonomisches System in Erscheinung getreten. Das Diktum Engels' aber ist auch berechtigt: Die frühen Sozialisten (die

⁶ Klas-Göran Karlsson und Michael Schoenhals, *Crimes Against Humanity Under Communist Regimes* (Stockholm: Forum for Living History, 2008).

⁷ Friedrich Engels, „Die Entwicklung des Sozialismus von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft,“ in *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels – Werke*, Band 19 (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1962), 177–228.

nicht wussten, dass sie später als Sozialisten bezeichnet werden würden), entwickelten nicht nur Utopien künftiger Gesellschaften, sondern sie speisten – wie der weitestgehend vergessene Franz Heinrich Ziegenhagen (1753–1803) oder der messianische Wandergeselle Wilhelm Weitling (1808–1871) – ihre Ideen auch aus recht eklektisch zusammengewürfelten Versatzstücken (ur)christlichen Glaubens. Weitling verfasste 1845 gar ein *Evangelium eines armen Sünders*,⁸ der Franzose Étienne Cabet (1788–1856) schrieb 1841 ein *Credo communiste*⁹ und selbst einer der Väter des sich später wissenschaftlich nennenden Sozialismus, Friedrich Engels, entwarf 1847 ein ebensolches *Kommunistisches Glaubensbekenntnis*.¹⁰ Davon entfernte sich sozialistisches Denken spätestens unter dem Einfluss der Schriften von Karl Marx (1818–1883),¹¹ der nun tatsächlich Wissenschaft betrieb, auch wenn sein Denken nicht gänzlich frei von mythischen Elementen war,¹² und der unbestritten zu den Gründungsfiguren der Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften zählt.

Offensichtlich, auch wenn man nicht Anhänger der Systemtheorie ist, muss man zur Kenntnis nehmen, dass sich die Logiken der Wissenschaft und der Politik unterscheiden: Wissenschaft geht es tendenziell um Wahrheit, Politik um die Durchsetzung von Interessen oder die Gestaltung der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse.¹³ Doch motivierte der Hintergrund eines wissenschaftlichen Anspruches die handelnden politischen Akteure der frühen Sozialdemokratie und der aus ihr sich absplittenden kommunistischen Bewegung – auch wenn die wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten

⁸ Wilhelm Weitling, *Evangelium eines armen Sünders* (Bern: Jenni, 1845).

⁹ Étienne Cabet, *Credo communiste* (Paris: Rouannet, 1841).

¹⁰ Friedrich Engels, „Entwurf des „Kommunistischen Glaubensbekenntnisses“ [1847],“ *Zeitschrift für Marxistische Erneuerung*, nr. 93 (März 2013), <https://www.zeitschrift-marxistische-erneuerung.de/de/article/457.entwurf-des-kommunistischen-glaubensbekenntnisses-1847.html>.

¹¹ Die Diskussion des Zusammenhangs von Christentum und Sozialismus hat sich aber bis ins 20. Jh. hinein nicht erledigt, vgl. z. B. Brigitte Kahl und Jan Rehmann, Hrg., *Muss ein Christ Sozialist sein? Nachdenken über Helmut Gollwitzer*, Argument Sonderband AS 232 (Hamburg: Argument, 1994).

¹² Robert Tucker, *Karl Marx. Die Entwicklung seines Denkens von der Philosophie zum Mythos* (München: Beck, 1963).

¹³ Gleichwohl gibt und gab es immer Versuche einer Verbindung beider Sphären, die jedoch kritisch zu betrachten ist, wie Hannah Arendt in *Sokrates. Apologie der Pluralität* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2016), 44 gegenüber Platons Politikkonzeption einwendete, die sie als „Tyrannei der Wahrheit“ bezeichnete.

in gewissem Sinne „ausgeschlachtet“ wurden – ein Glaubenssystem zu erschaffen.

Erich Fromm (1900-1980) entwirft in *Pathologie der Normalität*¹⁴ einen Religionsbegriff, der deutlich macht, warum der Sozialismus, ebenso wie der Faschismus (aber auch das dritte große moderne, von Fromm nicht genannte politische Glaubenssystem, der Liberalismus), als religiöses Phänomen begriffen werden kann: Fromm fasst in anthropologischer Perspektive „Religion ganz weit als Bedürfnis nach einem System der Orientierung, das in der einen oder anderen Form für alle Menschen typisch ist“. ¹⁵ In der ihm eigenen Vorsicht formuliert Fromm, er habe

den Eindruck, daß das Bedürfnis nach einem sinngebenden Bezugsrahmen und das Bedürfnis nach einem Objekt der Hingabe, die uns befähigen, unsere Kräfte auf Dinge zu lenken, die den Prozeß der Produktion von Gegenständen zum Erhalt unseres Lebens übersteigen, daß diese zwei Bedürfnisse imperativer Natur sind und nicht unbefriedigt bleiben können.¹⁶

Ganz explizit macht Fromm, dass als Religion nicht nur die „theistische Religion“, sondern ebenso etwa fernöstliche Glaubenssysteme gefasst werden können – und auch „der Stalinismus oder der Faschismus, eben weil sie jene Bedürfnisse im Menschen ansprechen [...]“. ¹⁷ Aktuellere Autoren und Autorinnen sprechen weniger stark von Religion, als von „großen“ Erzählungen oder Mythen.¹⁸ Der Generationsgenosse Erich Fromms, Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), spricht im Zusammenhang mit dem Sozialismus auch nicht explizit von Religion, sondern von Mythen, wenn er über die „mythologische[] Struktur des Kommunismus“¹⁹ schreibt: Marx habe

einen der großen eschatologischen Mythen der asiatisch-mediterranen Welt wiederentdeckt und weitergeführt: die Erlöserrolle des Gerechten ([...] in unserer Zeit das Proletariat), dessen Leidensberufung ist, den ontologischen Zustand der Welt zu verändern. Die klassenlose

¹⁴ Erich Fromm, *Die Pathologie der Normalität. Zur Wissenschaft vom Menschen* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2021).

¹⁵ Fromm, *Die Pathologie*, 34.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 32.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ Vgl. Samira El Ouassil und Friedemann Karig, *Erzählende Affen. Mythen, Lügen, Utopien. Wie Geschichten unser Leben bestimmen* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2023).

¹⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Das Heilige und das Profane. Vom Wesen des Religiösen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016), 178.

Gesellschaft und das daraus resultierende Verschwinden der historischen Spannungen sind im Mythos vom Goldenen Zeitalter, das nach vielen Überlieferungen den Beginn und das Ende der Geschichte kennzeichnet, bereits genau vorgezeichnet.²⁰

Marx ist dabei nicht der Einzige, der solchen Erzählmustern folgt, wir finden sie auch bei anderen Vorläufern des Sozialismus,²¹ wie den Wiedertäufern oder Thomas Münzer (1489-1525), die im Rahmen einer sozialradikalen, aber christlichen Weltansicht argumentierten.

Eliade thematisiert sogar explizit die Rolle des Bösen im marxischen Denken, wenn er Marx' Konzeption des Proletariats beschreibt:

man denke nur an die prophetische und soteriologische Rolle, die er dem Proletariat erteilt, und an den Endkampf zwischen dem Guten und dem Bösen, den man ohne weiteres gleichsetzen kann mit dem apokalyptischen Kampf zwischen Christus und dem Antichrist, aus dem der erstere siegreich hervorgeht.²²

Wir werden damit schon auf ein Grundelement des Bösen verwiesen, das im Sozialismus eine Rolle spielen wird.

Kommen wir zurück auf Fromms Bestimmung des Religiösen als Orientierungsrahmen und Objekt der Hingabe. Um Sozialismus in Fromms Sinne hinreichend als Religion zu bestimmen, wäre erstens zu fragen: *Was ist dieser Orientierungsrahmen im Sozialismus?* Zweitens wäre die Frage zu stellen: *Was ist das Objekt der Hingabe im Sozialismus?* Und hier stoßen wir schon auf Schwierigkeiten, denn es ist offensichtlich schwer, alle historischen Phänomene, die sich sozialistisch nannten, unter einen Begriff zu fassen. Vielmehr lassen sich unterschiedliche Formen sozialistischen Glaubens identifizieren, die, wie wir später sehen werden, mit unterschiedlichen Erscheinungsweisen des Bösen im Sozialismus korrespondieren.

Dennoch gibt es so etwas wie einen sozialistischen Grundgedanken: „die Abschaffung der Herrschaft von Menschen über Menschen.“²³ Wir finden diesen in unterschiedlichen Formulierungen im Laufe der Zeit. In

²⁰ *Ibidem.*

²¹ Den Begriff prägend: Karl Kautsky, *Die Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus*, zwei Bände (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1895); kritisch und wenigerursorisch: Max Beer, *Allgemeine Geschichte des Sozialismus und der sozialen Kämpfe* (Paderborn: Salzwater, 2013).

²² Eliade, *Das Heilige*, 178.

²³ Stichwort „Sozialismus“, in: Klaus Schubert und Martina Klein, *Das Politiklexikon* (Bonn: Dietz, 2020), <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/lexika/politiklexikon/18235/sozialismus/>, abgerufen am 25. Januar 2024.

der klassischen marxischen Formulierung aus der *Einleitung zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie* lesen wir, es gelte „alle Verhältnisse umzuwerfen, in denen der Mensch ein erniedrigtes, ein geknechtetes, ein verlassenes, ein verächtliches Wesen ist“.²⁴

Positiv gewendet findet sich eine ähnliche Formulierung im *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*, wenn die Zukunftsvision einer Assoziation beschrieben wird, in der „die freie Entwicklung eines jeden die Bedingung für die freie Entwicklung aller ist“.²⁵

Der Frankfurter Sozialphilosoph Axel Honneth reformuliert in *Die Idee des Sozialismus* diesen Imperativ im Jahr 2015 weniger poetisch, dafür akademisch prosaisch: Er fasst hier die von ihm so genannte Soziale Freiheit²⁶ als Kerngedanken des Sozialismus, und definiert diese als „an der sozialen Praxis einer Gemeinschaft teilnehmen, in der die Mitglieder sich untereinander so viel Anteilnahme entgegenbringen, daß sie sich um des jeweils anderen willen wechselseitig zur Verwirklichung ihrer begründeten Bedürfnisse verhelfen“.²⁷ Leider ist hier nicht der Ort, diese problematische Definition umfassend zu kritisieren. Es sei nur vermerkt, dass sich in dem scheinbar altruistischen Grundgedanken ein Paternalismus versteckt, der auch anderen Sozialismusbestimmungen eigen ist; denn wer bestimmt, was die *begründeten* Bedürfnisse sind und wie ließe sich bestimmen, was des je anderen Willen sei? Die Idee der Abschaffung der Herrschaft des Menschen über den Menschen droht hier, trotz wohl bester Absichten, in die Idee einer „sozialen“ Herrschaft zu kippen – Honneth ist da kein Einzelfall.

Es ließen sich zahllose andere Definitionen finden, die, je nach Perspektive, andere Aspekte am Sozialismus hervorheben. Die Vielfalt an sich zum Teil arg widersprechenden Sozialismuskonzepten lässt sich nach Michael Brie in zwei „allgemeine Formeln“ des Sozialistischen bringen: eine *kommunistische* und eine *libertäre*:

²⁴ Marx, „Kritik“, 385.

²⁵ Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels, „Das Kommunistische Manifest“, in *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels – Werke*, Band 4 (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1977), 682.

²⁶ Zur Kritik des Begriffes der Sozialen Freiheit: Karsten Schubert, „In Ruhe gelassen werden: Das Zusammenspiel von negativer und sozialer Freiheit in der Kritik an Identitätspolitik“, in Nicole J. Saam und Heiner Bielefeldt, *Die Idee der Freiheit und ihre Semantiken. Zum Spannungsverhältnis von Freiheit und Sicherheit* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2023), 149–58.

²⁷ Honneth, *Sozialismus*, 47.

Die eine allgemeine Formel formuliert die Entwicklung des Gemeinschaftlichen als Ziel und betrachtet die Entwicklung der Individuen als Mittel der Entwicklung des Gemeinschaftlichen. [...] Die andere Formel fokussiert sich auf die Entwicklung der Individuen als Ziel und betrachtet den Reichtum der Gemeingüter als Mittel derselben.²⁸

Damit werden zwei konfligierende Orientierungsrahmen sozialistischen Denkens deutlich, die mit unterschiedlichen Objekten der Hingabe korrespondieren, wenn wir in der Terminologie Fromms bleiben wollen: Der kommunistische Orientierungsrahmen richtet sich am Pol der Etablierung einer Gemeinschaft aus (und tendiert damit ins Abstrakte); der libertäre am Pol der individuellen Entwicklung der Einzelnen (und tendiert damit ins Konkrete, Personale). Objekte der Hingabe wären im ersten Formen des Gemeinschaftlichen wie die Arbeiterklasse, die Partei, oder später: der Staat (der ja nach Engels und Lenin eigentlich absterben sollte), im kapitalistischen Ausland: die Kommune, die Wohngemeinschaft, die Gruppe. Im zweiten Fall bin ich selbst das Objekt der Hingabe (wogegen sich bekanntlich Marx in seiner beißenden Kritik an Stirner abgearbeitet hat²⁹) oder der oder die andere, der oder die zu bekehren oder zu retten ist – in der Regel durch Bildungs- und Erziehungsarbeit, wie in Leonard Nelsons (1882–1927) ethischem Sozialismus.³⁰ Beide Perspektiven schließen sich nie gänzlich aus: Auch im kommunistischen Staat wurde die Entfaltung der Einzelnen (in gewissen Grenzen) als Ziel (nicht nur als Mittel) propagiert. Je nach Beobachtungsperspektive ändert sich daher in der Regel auch die Akzentsetzung dessen, was als Sozialismus ins Auge fällt. – Und sie ist Grundlage der zahlreichen innersozialistischen Auseinandersetzungen, die historisch zu beobachten waren.³¹ Es handelt sich aber weniger um ein Schisma, mehr um eine für den Blick auf den Sozialismus konstitutive Unschärferelation.³²

²⁸ Michael Brie, *Sozialismus neu entdecken. Ein hellblaues Bändchen zu den Widersprüchen einer solidarischen Gesellschaft* (Hamburg: VSA, 2022), 116.

²⁹ Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels, „Die Deutsche Ideologie“, in *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels – Werke*, Band 3, (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1969), 5–530.

³⁰ Jürgen Ziechmann, *Theorie und Praxis der Erziehung bei Leonard Nelson und seinem Bund* (Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt, 1970).

³¹ Vgl. auch Brie, *Sozialismus*, 117.

³² Bini Adamczak diskutiert dieses Verhältnis und seine realgeschichtlichen Manifestationen in der Oktoberrevolution von 1917 und der globalen Revolte von

Einem weiteren möglichen Missverständnis gilt vorzubeugen: Ich wähle in diesem Aufsatz eine Interpretationsperspektive, die Sozialismus *als Religion* in den Blick nimmt. Unbenommen davon bleibt, dass sich das Phänomen Sozialismus nicht im Religiösen erschöpft. Er kann und muss selbstverständlich auch als Gesellschaftsordnung, soziale Bewegung, wissenschaftliche Theorie oder soziales Organisationsprinzip verstanden und interpretiert werden – das würde aber den Rahmen des Aufsatzes sprengen.³³

2.2. Das Böse

Was ist das Böse? Über diese Frage besteht weder in der Theologie noch in der Philosophie und auch nicht im *commons sense* Übereinstimmung, es gibt keine allgemeingültige Definition.³⁴ Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) sagt in New Yorker *Vorlesung über einige Fragen der Ethik* von 1965: „[D]as wirklich Böse ist das, was bei uns sprachloses Entsetzen verursacht, wenn wir nichts anderes mehr sagen können als: Dies hätte nie geschehen dürfen.“³⁵ Im Hinblick auf den kategorischen Unterschied zwischen den Verbrechen des Stalinismus und denen des Nationalsozialismus konkretisiert sie den Begriff des Bösen über diese auf das Ergebnis bezogene Komponente um einen weiteren Aspekt, den der Täter: „Das größte begangene Böse ist das Böse, das von Niemanden getan wurde, das heißt, von menschlichen Wesen, die sich weigern, Personen zu sein.“³⁶ Arendt bezieht sich dabei auf die industrielle Vernichtung von Menschen in der Shoa und ihre Wahrnehmung vieler der Täter (exemplarisch dafür stand Adolf Eichmann) als Menschen, die jede Verantwortung für ihr Tun abstreiten, sondern „immer nur Befehle“³⁷ befolgen. Arendts Analyse Eichmanns ist seit langer Zeit als fragwürdig diskutiert und es wurde herausgearbeitet, dass Eichmann und andere Täter und Täterinnen durchaus eigene Motivationen für Ihre Taten hatten; sie also nicht bewusstlose Maschinen waren, sondern durchaus

1968 in *Beziehungsweise Revolution. 1917, 1968 und kommende* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017) durch eine ähnliche Optik.

³³ Georg Fülbert, *Sozialismus* (Köln: PapyRossa, 2019), 6–13.

³⁴ Eine kurze und instruktive Übersicht bietet Christian Schäfer, *Was ist das Böse? Philosophische Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Ditzingen: Reclam, 2021), 11–13.

³⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Über das Böse. Eine Vorlesung zu Fragen der Ethik* (München: Pieper, 2023), 45.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 101.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

bewusst böse handelten.³⁸ Dennoch bleibt an dieser Formulierung ein relevanter Aspekt, der für das im Namen des Politischen, also auch des Sozialismus, begangene Böse relevant bleibt: Die Täter berufen sich oft auf Überpersönliches, sie sehen sich gleichsam Werkzeuge wahlweise der Vorsehung, des Fortschritts, der Partei oder schlichtweg Erfüller von Befehlen.

Wichtig scheint mir aber darauf hinzuweisen, dass Arendt vom „wirklich Bösen“ und vom „größte[n] begangene[n] Böse[n]“, an anderer Stelle vom „größte[n] Bösen“³⁹ spricht. Es handelt sich also bei der von ihr behandelten Frage vor dem Hintergrund des historisch singulären Holocaust um die Frage der stärksten Bedeutung, die dieser Begriff überhaupt annehmen kann. Es scheint für Arendt also auch geringere Abstufungen des Bösen zu geben.

Und in der Tat gibt es eine umfassende philosophische Debatte, darüber was das Böse sei. Diese Debatte soll im Rahmen dieses Aufsatzes nicht aufgenommen werden. Jedoch ist es für unsere Fragestellung relevant, eine operationale Begriffsbestimmung des Bösen zu identifizieren, mit der wir auf die Suche nach dem Bösen im Glauben an den Sozialismus gehen können.

Ein erster Blick lohnt in das *Deutsche Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*, in dem sich nicht weniger als neun Bedeutungsvarianten des Wortes (von schmerzhaft über verletzend oder krank bis hin zu teuflisch) finden.⁴⁰ Eine erste pragmatische definitorische Annäherung finden wir im *Digitalen Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Hier wird böse an erster Stelle als „sittlich schlecht, seine Mitmenschen schädigend“,⁴¹ an zweiter Stelle mit „Übles verursachend, Unheil bringend“⁴² bestimmt. Weitere weniger prominent vertretene Bestimmungen folgen. Ähnliche Konnotationen finden sich in der antiken Philosophie mit den

³⁸ David Cesarani, *Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes, and Trial of a „Desk Murderer“* (London: Da Capo Press, 2007).

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 77.

⁴⁰ Stichwort „Böse“, in *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*, digitalisierte Fassung im Wörterbuchnetz des Trier Center for Digital Humanities, Version 01/23, <https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=B10095>, abgerufen am 16. November 2023.

⁴¹ Stichwort „Böse“, in *Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, <https://www.dwds.de/wb/b%C3%B6se>, abgerufen am 16. November 2023.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

Konzepten *κακός* oder *malum*, die mit dem Schlechten oder dem Üblen übersetzt werden können – jedoch auch mit böse.⁴³

Nun scheint mir für eine Bestimmung des Bösen eine solche Fassung jedoch ebenso ungeeignet wie die Arendts. Denn während Arendts Begriff des Bösen auf die extremste Version des Bösen überhaupt sich bezieht, ist die Bestimmung des Bösen als lediglich übel und schlecht zu schwach, um klare begriffliche Abgrenzungen zu ermöglichen. Ich folge daher im Rahmen dieses Aufsatzes Christian Schäfer, der in *Was ist das Böse?* schreibt, dass „der Begriff des «Bösen» im Deutschen [...] über seine bloß moralische Grundbedeutung hinaus als diejenige Bezeichnung alles Negativen [dient], die dieses am intensivsten zum Ausdruck bringt und es in der allgemeinen Auffassung geradezu versinnbildlicht“.⁴⁴

Dieses Konzept scheint mir hinreichend konkret und dennoch offen genug, um danach zu suchen, was im Sozialismus als Böses galt. Für eine Hermeneutik des Bösen im Sozialismus ist eine solche Bestimmung auch wichtig, denn es stellt sich für dieses Unterfangen ein Problem, das sich beispielsweise beim Sprechen über das Böse im Christentum nicht stellt: Das Wort *böse* hat keinen prominenten Status im sozialistischen Denken oder der sozialistischen Ethik und Moral – wie es überhaupt – trotz diverser Ansätze – an einer elaborierten sozialistischen Moralphilosophie mangelt. Wir werden später sehen, woran das liegt. Hier genügt die Feststellung.

Es wird also schwer, die Rede über das Böse im Sozialismus am Wort fest zu machen, wir müssen nach einem begrifflichen Gehalt suchen, wenn wir darüber sprechen wollen. Die formale Bestimmung Schäfers als *das, was das Negativste zum Ausdruck bringt*, erscheint mir dafür sinnvoll.

Eine letzte Differenzierung scheint mir zum vorläufigen Abschluss dieser Überlegungen wichtig: Es gilt, drei Elemente zu unterscheiden, in denen das Negativste zum Ausdruck kommen kann: Es sind dies bösen *Handlungen* von Menschen, die deswegen aber nicht selbst als böse betrachtet werden müssen, und die von tatsächlich bösen *Personen* zu unterscheiden sind.⁴⁵ Zuletzt sind es möglicherweise nichtmenschliche *Dinge, Objekte* oder *Zuständen*, die als böse gelten können.

⁴³ Schäfer, *Was ist das Böse*, 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 10. Eine ähnliche vorläufige Bestimmung des Bösen nimmt Luke Russel, *Das Böse. Eine philosophische Spurensuche* (Ditzingen: Reclam, 2023), 13, vor, um dann zahlreiche Variationen dieses Motivs durchzuspielen.

⁴⁵ Zusammenfassend zu dieser Fragestellung vgl. Russel, *Das Böse*, 103–42.

Gehen wir nach diesem kleinen Propädeutikum nun in *medias res*: Wie wurde das Böse im Sozialismus gedacht?

3. Kein Böses in den gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen

Die erste Thematisierung des Bösen, auf die wir im sozialistischen Denken stoßen, ist eine merkwürdige Form. Sie kann gewissermaßen als Negation des Bösen überhaupt verstanden werden und sie richtet sich explizit gegen eine Personifikation und gegen eine Moralisierung des Bösen. Die Grundidee ist: Es gibt das Böse nicht. Daraus wird dann geschlussfolgert, dass das, was als böse an Menschen oder Situationen wahrgenommen werde, aus einem Fehltrail resultiere. Vielmehr gebe es richtige oder falsche Verhältnisse, und das, was als *böse* erscheint, ist „nur“ ein Hinweis darauf, dass etwas falsch eingerichtet ist, und zum Richtigen hin zu verändern sei.

Dieser Gedanke findet sich schon vor den kanonisierten Frühsozialisten beim Spätaufklärer Franz Heinrich Ziegenhagen in seinem Opus *Lehre vom richtigen Verhaeltnisse zu den Schoepfungswerken, und die durch oeffentliche Einfuehrung derselben zu bewuerkende allgemeine Menschenbegluekkung* aus dem Jahr 1792. Bei ihm verweilen wir ein wenig, denn Ziegenhagen hat vor dem Hintergrund einer religiösen Terminologie ein Konzept des Bösen entworfen, das für sozialistisches Denken als exemplarisch gelten kann.

In seinem Buch postuliert er, Gott habe die gesamte „sich selbst ueberlassene vernunft- und leblose Schoepfung“⁴⁶ nach den richtigen und guten Verhältnissen eingerichtet. Die Menschen aber seien von Gott nicht in dieses präparierte Verhältnis zu sich und anderen gesetzt, sondern mit der Aufgabe gesegnet, dieses selbst zu finden. Diese Aufgabe sei „der große Vorzug, mit welchem er sie vor andern Erdgeschoepfen begabte; dies ist der wahre Wuerkungkrais ihrer Faehigkeiten und Kraefte“.⁴⁷

In der bisherigen Menschheitsgeschichte hätten die Menschen dieses richtige Verhältnis, in dem sie ein gutes und glückliches Leben führen könnten, noch nicht gefunden. Sie lebten in falschen Verhältnissen, diese

⁴⁶ Franz Heinrich Ziegenhagen, *Lehre vom richtigen Verhaeltnisse zu den Schoepfungswerken, und die durch oeffentliche Einfuehrung derselben zu bewuerkende allgemeine Menschenbegluekkung* (Hamburg: Selbstverlag, 1792), 5, Digitalisat verfügbar unter <https://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/details:bsb11111115>, abgerufen am 19. November 2023.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 6.

Verhältnisse seien aber *nicht* schlecht oder böse, sie erschienen nur so. Sie hätten vielmehr einen Sinn – und dieser sei pädagogisch: So müssten die „Uebel bloß fuer Zurechtweisungen einer alweisen Erziehung der Menschen erkannt werden“, ⁴⁸ denn, so Ziegenhagen weiter:

Alle sogenannten physischen und moralschen Uebel unter den Menschen sind also nicht ueberschoepfungsmaessige, «uebernaturliche», oder zwecklose Strafen – wie waere dies auch mit der Allweisheit und Allguete des Schoepfers zusammenzudenken? – sondern sie sind schoepfungsmaeßig erfolgende, «naturliche», belehrende Zurechtweisungen einer begluekkenden goettlichen Ausbildung und Vervollkommung sinnlichvernuenftigfreier Geschoepfe [...].⁴⁹

Eine göttliche Pädagogik ist also am Werk, in der das als Böses Erscheinende nur ein Wink ist, der die Menschen auf den rechten Pfad der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung führen will. Wirklich Böses gibt es so für Ziegenhagen gar nicht, es erscheint den Menschen nur so.⁵⁰

Dieser Weg aus den üblen Verhältnissen ist – dahin greift Ziegenhagen den späteren Sozialisten und Sozialistinnen vor – ein gemeinschaftlicher: „Freilich kann sich kein einzelner Mensch dies richtige Verhaeltnis ganz allein erschaffen, denn unentbehrlich ist zu demselben der Umgang mit seines Gleichen. Er ist bestimmt, als geselliges Geschoepf zu leben und sich zu bilden.“⁵¹

Brüderlichkeit ist das Mittel Ziegenhagens gegen alle Übel; Brüderlichkeit sei nötig, um eine „algemeine Weltvaterlandsiebe zu stiften“⁵² und so „alle Bewohner der schoenen Erde Gottes zu einem großen, gleichdenkenden und gleichhandelnden Volk“⁵³ zu vereinen. Die „herzvergiftenden Furien: Nazionalhas und Volkspatriotismus“⁵⁴ sollen aufgegeben und durch Brüderlichkeit ersetzt werden – keine „parteischen Benennungen von Menschenhaufen“⁵⁵ sollen mehr vorkommen: „Wir nennen uns Menschen!“⁵⁶

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 61.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 65.

⁵⁰ Diese Denkfigur ist freilich keine originelle Erfindung Ziegenhagens, vgl. etwa Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Essais de théodicée* (Amsterdam: Troyel, 1710).

⁵¹ Ziegenhagen, *Lehre vom richtigen Verhaeltnisse*, 6.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 293.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 293.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 629.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 292.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 293.

Das Pendel sozialistischen Denkens, das bei Ziegenhagen klar religiöse Qualität hat (nicht nur glaubt er offensichtlich selbst an die von ihm auf 600 Seiten entwickelte Utopie, auch plädiert er dafür, dass dieser Glaube von allen angenommen werden solle), schlägt bei ihm in Richtung Kommunismus aus. Er ähnelt damit Étienne Cabet, der ein ähnliches Konzept in einem – scheiternden – Projekt versuchte umzusetzen.⁵⁷ Es gab aber mit Charles Fourier auch einen Frühsozialisten, der eine neue Gesellschaft, die nach den richtigen Verhältnissen eingerichtet und so dem Bösen auf der Welt ein Ende bereiten sollte, nicht aus der Perspektive eines „gleichdenkenden und gleichhandelnden Volk[s]“ konzipierte, sondern von den Bedürfnissen und Begehren der Einzelnen ausging – und so eine libertäre Spielart des Glaubens an den Sozialismus entwarf.⁵⁸

Auch wenn die Sprache Ziegenhagens wenig an die späteren Sozialistinnen und Sozialisten und des von ihnen vertretenen Szientismus erinnert, so sind die von ihm formulierten Motive doch tragend für die Verneinung der Existenz des Bösen im sozialistischen Denken, für das Jahrzehnte nach Ziegenhagen, dessen Schrift in Vergessenheit geriet, Karl Marx die geistigen Fundamente legte.

In seinem unvollendeten, dreibändigem Hauptwerk *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* entfaltete Marx eine umfassende Theorie des Kapitalismus, der in Analogie zur biologischen Wissenschaft⁵⁹ seiner Zeit am Kern des gesellschaftlichen Organismus anknüpft: „Für die bürgerliche Gesellschaft ist aber die Warenform des Arbeitsprodukts oder die Wertform der Ware die ökonomische Zellenform.“⁶⁰ Von der Kritik dieser Form ausgehend („Ihre [der Ware, RP] Analyse ergibt, daß sie ein sehr vertracktes Ding ist, voll metaphysischer Spitzfindigkeit und theologischer Mucken.“⁶¹), entwickelt er in der weiteren Argumentation

⁵⁷ Joachim Höppner und Waltraud Seidel-Höppner, *Etienne Cabet und seine Ikarische Kolonie. Sein Weg vom Linksliberalen zum Kommunisten und seine Kolonie in Darstellung und Dokumentation* (Frankfurt a. M.: P. Lang, 2002).

⁵⁸ Charles Fourier, *Ceuvres complètes de Ch. Fourier*. 6 Bände (Paris: Librairie Sociétaire, 1841–1848).

⁵⁹ Zur komplexen Debatte dieses Zusammenhangs vgl. z. B. Ralph Colp, Jr., „The Contacts Between Karl Marx and Charles Darwin“, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, Nr. 2 (April–June 1974): 329–38.

⁶⁰ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Erster Band* (= *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels – Werke*, Band 23, (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1962), 12.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 85.

unter anderem einen Begriff des Fetischismus als falsches, entfremdetes Verhältnis zur Welt – das es aufzuklären gelte. Ziegenhagen lässt grüßen. Das Böse als moralische Kategorie hat auch in dieser Konzeption keinen Platz. So lesen wir:

Im großen und ganzen hängt dies aber auch nicht vom guten oder bösen Willen des einzelnen Kapitalisten ab. Die freie Konkurrenz macht die immanenten Gesetze der kapitalistischen Produktion dem einzelnen Kapitalisten gegenüber als äußerliches Zwangsgesetz geltend.⁶²

Es mag zwar, so lässt sich Marx paraphrasieren, durchaus vom guten oder bösen Willen einzelner Menschen gesprochen werden, aber dieser hat wenig Macht im Vergleich zu den Zwängen des kapitalistischen Marktes. Analoge Argumentationsmuster nutzt später auch Friedrich Engels für die Analyse politischen Handelns, so in einem Brief von 1885:

Dann gehöre ich nicht zu denen, die die Handlungen der Regierungen einfach aus ihrem guten oder bösen Willen erklären; dieser Wille selbst ist bedingt durch Ursachen, die unabhängig von ihnen sind: durch die allgemeine Situation. Es handelt sich hier also nicht um den guten oder bösen Willen des Herrn Clémenceau.⁶³

Schon in zahlreichen vor dem *Kapital* verfassten Schriften wenden sich Marx und sein Kompagnon Friedrich Engels explizit gegen irgendeine moralische Konzeption des Bösen. Vor allem in ihren frühen Schriften finden sich etliche Passagen, in denen Marx und Engels den Begriff, aber grundsätzlich ironisch, verwenden, um die Moralvorstellungen ihrer Gegner zu karikieren.⁶⁴ Insbesondere in *Die heilige Familie* nutzen sie das Wort sehr oft, eben weil es von den Autoren, die sie kritisieren, genutzt wird, gleichsam um es gegen sie zu wenden und gegen die rhetorische Funktion der Nutzung dieses Wortes zu polemisieren. So wenn sie schreiben: „Rudolph selbst gilt sich als ein Guter, und die Bösen sind dazu

⁶² *Ibidem*, 286; ähnlich auch in: idem, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Zweiter Band* (= *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels – Werke*, Band 24, (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1963), 409.

⁶³ Friedrich Engels, „An das Redaktionskollegium des «Socialiste» vom 21.10.1885“, in *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels – Werke*, Band 21 (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1962), 227.

⁶⁴ Vgl. z.B. Friedrich Engels, „Die wahren Sozialisten“, in *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels – Werke*, Band 4 (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1977), 269, „Die wahren Sozialisten“; oder Karl Marx, „Die moralisierende Kritik und die kritisierende Moral. Beitrag zur Deutschen Kulturgeschichte. Gegen Karl Heinzen“, in *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels – Werke*, Band 4 (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1977), 334, 335, 353.

da, ihm den Selbstgenuß seiner eignen Vortrefflichkeit zu gewähren.“⁶⁵ Tragischerweise wird das, wogegen Marx und Engels hier anschreiben, im folgenden Jahrhundert ein Phänomen sein, dass auch im Sozialismus wieder auferstehen wird – wohl war es in der Praxis nie verschwunden.

Wie dem auch sei, die Denkfigur, die Ursache übler Zustände nicht in bösen Absichten von Menschen zu suchen, sondern in den sozialen (Marx) oder von Gott gegebenen (Ziegenhagen) Verhältnissen, kann als ein zentrales Element sozialistischen Denkens gelten. Böse sei nicht der Mensch – falsch eingerichtet sei lediglich das gesellschaftliche System, und mit der richtigen Einsicht ließe sich das ändern.

Schon früh versuchten sozialistische Schriftstellerinnen und Schriftsteller die Idee der moralisch verwerflichen sozialen Verhältnisse auch als Erkenntnis an Kinder zu vermitteln. So beispielsweise in der Schilderung der schockierenden Lebens- und Arbeitsverhältnisse in der frühindustriellen Heimarbeit in Emma Adlers (1858–1935) *Buch der Jugend*, dem ersten Lesebuch für ein jugendliches, proletarisches Lesepublikum aus dem Jahr 1895.⁶⁶ Auch wenn es scheint, dass sich Adler bewusst war, dass nur den Kapitalismus zu beschuldigen, keine genügend gute pädagogische Wirkung hat – denn es gibt in ihrem Buch auch zahlreiche Schilderungen als böse beschriebener Menschen.⁶⁷

Nun deutet sich aber schon bei Marx die Möglichkeit zu einer anderen, eben wie bei Adler *personifizierenden* Deutung des Bösen an. Der oben zitierte Mircea Eliade hat darauf verwiesen. Die marxsche wissenschaftliche Vorlage wurde recht schnell, da sie für die Auseinandersetzungen in der Tagespolitik weder für die Gewerkschaften noch für die Sozialdemokratie handlungsleitend sein konnte, politisch umgeformt in eine antagonistische, nun eben marxistische Version: Schlecht war nun nicht mehr das System; böse waren die, die vom System profitierten: die Bourgeoisie. Der Sozialismus verabschiedet sich damit sehr schnell von seinem

⁶⁵ Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels, „Die heilige Familie oder Kritik der kritischen Kritik. Gegen Bruno Bauer und Konsorten“, in *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels – Werke*, Band 2, (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1962), 215.

⁶⁶ Emma Adler, hrsg., *Buch der Jugend. Für die Kinder des Proletariats* (Berlin: Verlag der Expedition des „Vorwärts“, 1895), 207–55.

⁶⁷ In der Geschichte von der „bösen Schwester“, in: Die zwölf Monate, Adler, 225–30 oder die brutale und grausame Geschichte, in der dem Troll Böses mit Bösem vergolten wird, Adler, 1–13; der sozialistische Wert dieser Erzählung muss dem Leser rätselhaft bleiben – er wirkt am Ende aber wie eine unbewusste Vorahnung auf die Gräueltaten, die im Namen des Sozialismus begangen werden.

aufklärerischen und humanistischen Potential, das die Verabschiedung von einem substantiellen Begriff des Bösen in sich trug, und verfiel einer destruktiven Dynamik der Produktion vermeintlich wirklich böser Menschen.

Doch bevor wir dazu kommen, ist die erste Figuration des Bösen, die bis hier beschrieben wurde, in ihren wesentlichen Elementen zusammenzufassen: Die von Zieghagen und Marx/Engels repräsentierten Formen des Sozialismus als Religion unterscheiden sich auf den ersten Blick stark. Fragen wir mit Fromm nach dem Orientierungsrahmen, den sie geben, so ist dieser bei Zieghagen eine gut gewollte göttliche Ordnung, an der sich die Menschen orientieren sollen, um zum glücklichen Leben zu kommen. Das Objekt der Hingabe, auf das sich die Energien richten sollen, ist die Erkenntnis dieser richtigen Ordnung (oder der richtigen Verhältnisse, um in Zieghagen Sprache zu bleiben). Bei Marx/Engels fehlt zwar Gott, aber die Idee einer Ordnung, an der sich die Menschen orientieren sollen, bleibt bestehen – und auch das Objekt der Hingabe: Die Erkenntnis dieser Ordnung bleibt, nur dass sie bei Marx/Engels durch intensive wissenschaftliche Arbeit der Welt abgerungen werden muss, während Zieghagen schon im Besitz der Erkenntnis ist, die nun nur noch vermittelt werden muss. – Das Böse erscheint in beiden Konzepten nur als Irrtum, der durch die Arbeit an der Erkenntnis der richtigen Verhältnisse ausgeräumt werden könne.

4. Das Böse im Anderen

Andere, ob Fremde oder Vertraute, als nicht nur anders als man selbst, sondern als böse zu betrachten, ist keine Erfindung des Sozialismus. Diese Denkfigur und ihre Folgen ziehen sich wie ein blutiger roter Faden durch die Weltgeschichte und es ist eine Tragödie, dass auch der Sozialismus, der ja im 19. Jahrhundert gerade versucht hat, eine aufgeklärte, rationale Weltsicht zu entwerfen, die dem Blutvergießen ein Ende bereitet, der dämonischen Kraft dieses Motivs erlegen ist.

Wir haben gesehen, dass sich Marx oder Engels sowohl gegen eine *Personifikation* des Bösen als auch gegen eine *Reifikation* des Bösen wenden. Das Böse existiere nicht, es existierten lediglich schlechte Verhältnisse (die aber für den objektiven Gang der Geschichte nötig – und zu überwinden seien), die das hervorbringen, was vermeintlich weniger aufgeklärte Zeitgenossen als *böse* beschreiben würden. Diese Perspektive ändert sich durch die Transformation der marxschen Wissenschaft in eine

marxistische Weltanschauung, gegen die sich Marx selbst ja mit dem von Engels überlieferten sprichwörtlich gewordenen bon mot „Alles, was ich weiß, ist, daß ich kein Marxist bin!“⁶⁸ zu wehren versuchte.

Nun ist aber, seit Veröffentlichung des *Manifests der Kommunistischen Partei*, der strukturelle Gegensatz zwischen Arbeiterklasse und Bourgeoisie (den Marx eben als strukturellen Konflikt, nicht als zwischenmenschlichen, analysierte) ein Motiv, das für die Idee des Bösen im Anderen sehr anfällig ist. Die sozialdemokratische Presse des ausgehenden 19. und beginnenden 20. Jahrhunderts war voll von Polemisierungen gegen die „Herrn Kapitalisten“.

War diese Polemik vor 1917 das Vorrecht einer subalternen Gruppe, die nur wenig andere Mittel zur Verfügung hatte, änderte sich das nach der Oktoberrevolution und der Festigung der Macht der Bolschewiki, zumindest für den von ihnen kontrollierten, riesigen Raum der Sowjetunion.

Dass das Böse im nichtproletarischen Anderen zu finden sei, wird von keinem Wort so treffend ausgedrückt wie im Terminus „Klassenfeind“, den es in der UdSSR seit 1927 auch hochoffiziell gesetzlich genormt gab.⁶⁹ Der Klassenfeind war die transformierte Inkarnation der falschen Verhältnisse im konkreten bösen Menschen. Klassenfeind war nicht die antagonistische Klasse, wie sie noch im *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* formuliert wurde, sondern der konkrete andere, böse Mensch, der später dann gar zum „Volksfeind“ wurde, der sich leicht mit dem „Volksschädling“ verwechseln lässt, wie er im Nationalsozialismus auftauchte⁷⁰ – in diesem Sinne war er eine ganz und gar unmarxsche, aber symptomatisch marxistische Figur im stalinistischen Kommunismus.

Die Einführung des Motivs des Klassenfeindes reaktivierte das Motiv des bösen Anderen, gegen das Marx vor allem in seinen Frühschriften so intensiv polemisierte. Es wundert nicht, dass diese Figur nicht nur zur Legitimation einer entsetzlichen Reihe von Verfolgungen, Unterdrückung unliebsamer Gruppen diene – bis hin zu Massenmorden, sondern auch für antisemitische Ideologien anschlussfähig war, und in der Sowjetunion dann ja auch zur Verfolgung von Juden und Jüdinnen führte.

⁶⁸ Friedrich Engels, „Brief Engels an Paul Lafargue in Le Perreux“, in *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels – Werke*, Band 37 (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1967), 450.

⁶⁹ Artikel 58 des Strafgesetzbuches der RSFSR, <https://www.stsg.de/cms/sites/default/files/u7/Artikel%2058%20des%20Strafgesetzbuches%20UdSSR.pdf>, abgerufen am 21. November 2023.

⁷⁰ „Verordnung gegen Volksschädlinge“, *Reichsgesetzblatt*, Nr. 168 (6. September 1938).

Es zeigt sich hier eine erschreckende Parallele zum Nationalsozialismus und seinem Kronjuristen Carl Schmitt, für den es schon vor 1933 wichtig erschien, fremde Elemente aus der Gesellschaft auszuschneiden oder zu vernichten.⁷¹ Für ihn gab es – wie für Stalin – keine Gegner, sondern nur Feinde, die zu *vernichten* seien, weil sie eine Bedrohung für die eigene Existenz darstellten. Damit treffen wir auf eine spezifische Form des Bösen, auf die schon im Wörterbuch der Gebrüder Grimm aufmerksam gemacht wurde. Die Grimms formulieren gar die These, dass der Ursprung des Wortes *böse* auf eine Bezeichnung für den Feind oder Feindliches zurückgehen kann.⁷² Dabei gibt es in der offiziellen sowjetischen Sprache immer noch Vermantelungen, die das Böse scheinbar ins Abstrakte verlagern sollen, obwohl es sich doch schon gegen konkrete Menschen richtet. Die „Liquidierung des Kulaken als Klasse“⁷³ resultierte am Ende in der Vernichtung konkreter Menschen.

So weit, so schlecht. Ein weiteres Problem, das ja auch für die kommunistische Bewegung gravierend sich auswirken sollte, bestand nun in der Grenzziehung zwischen der feindlichen Gruppe und der eigenen Gruppe, zwischen den Feinden außen und den Feinden innen: Wo überall lauert er, der Klassenfeind, der entgrenzt wurde zum „Volksfeind“ oder zum „feindlichen Element“. Wie eine Krebserkrankung wucherte der Feind auch in die vormals „eigenen Reihen“, es gab keine Grenze mehr – die Schauprozesse der 1930er Jahre in der Sowjetunion waren eines ihrer blutigen Fanale – hier wie in anderen Ländern sollten weitere folgen.

Dass die Revolution ihre Kinder frisst, ist eine traurige Einsicht, die der Abgeordneten Pierre Vergniaud (1753-1793) in der Französischen Nationalversammlung noch als Warnung aussprach,⁷⁴ bevor er wenig später auf der Guillotine landete. Es war jedoch weniger der saturinische

⁷¹ Roger de Weck, *Die Kraft der Demokratie. Eine Antwort auf die autoritären Reaktionäre* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2020), 151.

⁷² Stichwort „Böse“, *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*: „wrêth, altn. reiðr, schw. dän. vred, zornig, zürnend, feind oder feindlich ergibt sich dieselbe subjective bedeutung auch für böse und wir fügen den dat. der person, oder die praep. auf, über hinzu. ein solcher gebrauch von böse lässt sich weder ahd. noch mhd. aufweisen, ist aber nhd. und nnl. so häufig und eingewurzelt, dasz er leicht der ursprüngliche sinn des worts gewesen sein kann.“

⁷³ Josef Stalin, „Antwort an die Genossen Swerdlower“, in *J. W. Stalin Werke*, Band 12 (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1954), 98.

⁷⁴ Dieter Thomä, *Väter. Eine moderne Heldengeschichte* (München: Hanser, 2008), 69.

Kindermord, vor dem er warnte, sondern der biblische Brudermord, der sich postrevolutionär, ob in Frankreich oder Russland, vollzog; oder, wie in der Kulturrevolution im maoistischen China, ein Mord an den Vätern unter der Autorität des kommunistischen Gottvaters.⁷⁵

Ob nun Kinder, Väter oder Brüder – es gibt ein Problem mit diesen vermeintlich Anderen – sie sind nicht ganz und gar anders: Sie sind miteinander verwandt – sie sind Menschen, und teilen damit auch Gleiches; etwas vom anderen ist immer auch in mir. Wir werden sehen, dass damit die Grenze des Bösen empfindlich getroffen ist. Doch resümieren wir kurz das hier Herausgearbeitete im Blick auf Sozialismus als Religion: Das Böse scheint aufzutauchen, wenn der Orientierungsrahmen unsicher wird, wenn er zwischen kommunistischer und libertärer Ausrichtung schwankt, wenn das Objekt der Hingabe zwischen gesellschaftlichen Strukturen, abgegrenzten Kollektiven und individuellen Personen oszilliert. Es entsteht in diesen Spaltungen ein freier Raum, ein Zwischenraum, den liberale Theoretiker und Theoretikerinnen wie Hannah Arendt als Möglichkeitsbedingung für Freiheit sahen – mir scheint er aber im Rahmen des Sozialismus als Irritation, die die Figur des bösen Anderen ermöglicht und vielleicht nötig macht. Dieser Zwischenraum ist damit kein Ort der Freiheit, sondern des Feindlichen, des Bösen.

Wenn es nun soweit gekommen ist, dass das Böse nicht mehr als nur Falsches in den abstrakten Strukturen der Gesellschaft zu finden ist; und auch nicht mehr im feindlichen und fremden anderen Kollektivsubjekt, sondern auch in der konkreten, mir gleichen anderen Person, dann ist der Schritt dahin, das Böse auch in mir selbst zu imaginieren, nur ein kleiner Schritt.

5. Das Böse in mir

Der Andere ist immer auch ein Spiegel meiner selbst.⁷⁶ Wenn ich im andern Böses finde, dann mag das auch nur eine Reflexion des Bösen in mir sein. Weiter: Das gesamtgesellschaftliche Böse – die falschen sozialen Verhältnisse – ist ja gesamtgesellschaftlich, also total, also bin ich Teil davon – es ist Teil von mir, ergo: auch in mir muss Böses lauern. Man mag diese Gedanken einer fiktiven Sozialistin in der Vergangenheit situieren,

⁷⁵ Yiching Wu, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins. Chinese Socialism in Crisis* (London: Harvard University Press, 2014).

⁷⁶ Ausgearbeitet hat dies beispielsweise der jüdische sozialistische Philosoph Martin Buber 1923 in *Ich und Du* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2008).

man kann jedoch nicht von einem *historischen* Prozess der Verlagerung des Bösen vom Abstrakten (die Verhältnisse) ins Kollektivsubjekt (die gegnerische Klasse) in die konkrete Person (der Klassenfeind) sprechen. Vielmehr handelt es sich um ein *systematisches* Problem: Die Grenzen zwischen den Figurationen, die das Böse jeweils annimmt, sind permeabel und transformierbar. Dies wird mit einem Blick in die Geschichte deutlich. Denn auch wenn man die Subjektivierung des Bösen in gewissem Sinne als Verfallsform eines sozialistischen Begriffs des Bösen sehen kann, die historisch dominant wurde, als der Sozialismus nicht nur in der Krise war, sondern von der realgeschichtlichen Bildfläche verschwunden ist, findet sich die Figur des Bösen in mir selbst schon im 19. Jahrhundert.

Sie manifestiert sich vor allem in einem ungeheurem Bildungseifer: um die Fehler und Übel, die die gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen den Einzelnen zufügten, zu beheben, zu kompensieren – oder sich für den Klassenkampf zu rüsten.⁷⁷ Der protestantische, sozialistische Pädagoge Heinz-Joachim Heydorn (1916-1974) brachte die notwendigen Zumutungen dieser Pädagogik auf den Punkt, wenn er den Bildungsprozess aus sozialistischer Perspektive mit recht drastischen Worten beschreibt: „Erziehung ist Zucht, notwendige Unterwerfung, die wir durchlaufen müssen, Aneignung, um die wir nicht herumkommen; Bildung ist Verfügung des Menschen über sich selber, Befreitsein, das in der Aneignung schon enthalten ist, aus ihr schließlich hervortreten soll.“⁷⁸

Heydorn, weit entfernt davon, ein rein individualistisches Bildungsprojekt zu entwerfen, macht deutlich, dass dieser Erziehungsprozess ein gesellschaftlicher zu sein hat:

[S]o ist es die Fiktion der Bildung, den von seiner Gesellschaftlichkeit abstrahierten Menschen befreien zu können. Sie wird zur Lebenslüge, indem sie den harmonischen Menschen bereits in einer Welt vorgibt, in der Abel stündlich erschlagen wird; indem sie die allseitige Entwicklung des Menschen in einer [...] Gesellschaft vortäuscht, die

⁷⁷ Das waren die beiden großen konfligierenden Strömungen der sozialistischen Bildungsbewegung, die eines einte: der Glaube an die Macht der Bildung. Vgl. etwa Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Wissen ist Macht – Macht ist Wissen. Vortrag gehalten zum Stiftungsfest des Dresdener Bildungsvereins am 5. Februar 1872 und zum Stiftungsfest des Leipziger Arbeiterbildungsvereins am 25. Februar 1872* (Leipzig: Verlag der Genossenschaftsbuchdruckerei, Leipzig, 1904).

⁷⁸ Heinz-Joachim Heydorn, *Zu einer Neufassung des Bildungsbegriffs* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), 120.

die partielle Begabung nach ihren Bedürfnissen erzeugt und wieder vernichtet.⁷⁹

Diese Idee lässt sich etwas provokativ auf die Fragestellung dieses Aufsatzes bezogen, so paraphrasieren: Ich kann mich bilden wie ich will, Reste des Schlechten und Bösen bleiben in mir, solange die Gesellschaft nicht verändert ist; wir hören das Echo von Marx in den Worten Heydorns, der wohlweislich nicht von Gegnern oder Feinden sprach, sondern von den Verhältnissen.

Nun ist dies aber eine milde Figur des Bösen, es ist nicht wirklich böse, mag man sagen, es ist mehr etwas Falsches oder ein Mangel – der behebbar ist. Diese Denkfigur war aber ungemein wirkmächtig, da sie gewissermaßen das immer wieder variierte Kernmotiv sozialistischer Pädagogik darstellt.⁸⁰ Es findet sich aber eine radikalere, mit dieser pädagogischen Version verwandte Form des Bösen in mir selbst in der Geschichte des Sozialismus. Sie ist eng verbunden mit der von Wladimir Iljitsch Lenin (1870–1924) eingeführten und von Josef Stalin (1878–1953) zur perfiden Perfektion gebrachten Parole der Selbstkritik.

Ausführlich äußert sich Josef Stalin in einem Referat auf der Versammlung des Aktivs der Moskauer Organisation der KPdSU(B) am 13. April 1928 über die zentrale Frage der Selbstkritik in der Partei und wie weit diese gehen darf:

Ich denke, Genossen, die Selbstkritik brauchen wir wie die Luft, wie das Wasser. Ich denke, unsere Partei könnte ohne sie, ohne die Selbstkritik, nicht vorwärts schreiten, sie könnte unsere Gebrechen nicht aufdecken, sie könnte unsere Mängel nicht beseitigen. Und Mängel gibt es bei uns viel. Das muss offen und ehrlich zugegeben werden.⁸¹

Während in dieser Rede noch eine positive Begründung für die Selbstkritik geliefert wird, die scheinbar einen Raum der Diskussion öffnet, wird doch schnell deutlich, wie der Hase läuft: In einem *Prawda*-Artikel wenige Wochen später konkretisiert Stalin seine Begründung der verstärkten Notwendigkeit von Selbstkritik: „Weil die Wühlarbeit der Klassenfeinde

⁷⁹ Idem, „Zum Verhältnis von Bildung und Politik“, in *Heinz-Joachim Heydorn, Werke, Band 2, Studienausgabe. Bildungstheoretische und pädagogische Schriften 1967–1970* (Wetzlar: Büchse der Pandora, 2004), 185.

⁸⁰ Robert Pfützner, *Solidarität bilden. Sozialistische Pädagogik im langen 19. Jahrhundert* (Bielefeld: Transkript, 2017).

⁸¹ Josef Stalin, „Über die Arbeiten des vereinigten Aprilplenums des ZK und der ZKK“, in *J. W. Stalin Werke*, Band 11 (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1954), 22.

der Sowjetmacht, die unsere Schwächen und unsere Fehler gegen die Arbeiterklasse unseres Landes ausnutzen, jetzt krasser als vor ein oder zwei Jahren in Erscheinung getreten ist.“⁸² Die Verknüpfung von Feinden und Selbstkritik wird immer wieder betont,⁸³ und macht deutlich, wie der Verdacht des Bösen so ins Innere der Genossen verlagert wird. Stalin macht auch sehr deutlich, was die charakterlichen Mängel seien, die es abzustellen gilt: „Die Angst, seine Fehler zuzugeben, nachdem man sich erst kürzlich an den Erfolgen berauscht hatte, die Angst vor Selbstkritik und der mangelnde Wunsch, die Fehler schnell und entschlossen gutzumachen – darin besteht die größte Schwierigkeit.“⁸⁴ Dass diese Angst durchaus begründet war, zeigte sich ja wenige Jahre später im Großen Terror. Auch in den stalinistischen Schauprozessen, in denen ja vordergründig die Anderen vor Gericht standen, ging es vielmehr um die Verankerung eines Bewusstseins darüber, selbst das Böse in sich zu haben, sowohl bei den Zuschauerinnen und Zuschauern, wie auch, zum Teil zumindest, bei den Angeklagten. Was die Figur des Bösen angeht, so wird hier eine quasi dialektische Bewegung deutlich: Das Böse im Anderen (Schädling) wird mit dem Bösen in mir (Angst vor Selbstkritik) verbunden – wenn ich mich nicht der Selbstkritik unterwerfe, bin ich selbst ein Schädling –; eine Dialektik des Bösen wird generiert, die zu völliger Entgrenzung tendiert, so dass fraglich ist, wer am Ende noch davor geschützt ist – außer Genossen Stalin, zumindest bis zu seinem Tod.

Hannah Arendt hat in *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft* herausgearbeitet, wie die von Stalin und vor ihm von Lenin als Selbstkritik angepriesene Methode letztlich zu einer Zerstörung von Individualität

⁸² Idem, „Gegen die Vulgarisierung der Losung der Selbstkritik“, in *J. W. Stalin Werke*, Band 11 (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1954), 72.

⁸³ 1929 hat für Stalin „die Frage der Losung der Selbstkritik an Schärfe gewonnen. Warum? Weil es unmöglich ist, unsere Wirtschafts-, Gewerkschafts- und Parteiorganisationen zu verbessern, weil es unmöglich ist, den Aufbau des Sozialismus vorwärts zu bringen und die Schädlingsarbeit der Bourgeoisie zu durchkreuzen, ohne die Kritik und Selbstkritik voll zu entfalten, ohne die Arbeit unserer Organisationen der Kontrolle der Massen zu unterstellen. Ist es doch eine Tatsache, dass es Schädlingsarbeit gegeben hat und noch immer gibt, nicht nur in den Kohlenrevieren, sondern auch in der Metallproduktion, in der Kriegsindustrie, im Volkskommissariat für Verkehrswesen, in der Gold- und Platinindustrie usw. usf. Daher die Losung der Selbstkritik.“ Idem, „Über die rechte Abweichung in der KPdSU(B). Rede auf dem Plenum des ZK und der ZKK der KPdSU(B) im April 1929, (Stenographisches Protokoll)“, in *J. W. Stalin Werke*, Band 12 (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1954), 13.

⁸⁴ Idem, „Antwort an die Genossen Kollektivbauern“, in *J. W. Stalin Werke*, Band 12 (Berlin, DDR: Dietz, 1954), 112.

und Privatheit und zu einer Atomisierung der Gesellschaft führte, die dadurch besser beherrschbar war – eben weil sie politisches Handeln der Menschen – verstanden als Bezugnahme aufeinander – verunmöglichte.⁸⁵

Der kommunistische Dichter Bertolt Brecht hatte eine Ahnung davon, wie der Kampf für eine bessere Welt auch die, die ihn kämpfen, nicht unbeschädigt hinterlässt. So lesen wir am Ende seines Gedichtes *An die Nachgeborenen*:

Dabei wissen wir ja:/ Auch der Haß gegen die Niedrigkeit/ Verzerrt
die Züge./ Auch der Zorn über das Unrecht/ Macht die Stimme heiser.
Ach, wir/ Die wir den Boden bereiten wollten für Freundlichkeit/
Konnten selber nicht freundlich sein./ Ihr aber, wenn es soweit sein
wird/ Daß der Mensch dem Menschen ein Helfer ist/ Gedenkt unsrer/
Mit Nachsicht.⁸⁶

Die Idee, dass sich das Böse in mir selbst findet, wurde im Westen von den Revoluzzern der 68er-Bewegung wieder aufgegriffen, nur in einer etwas andere Variante: Psychoanalyse und Selbstreflexion waren und – zumindest zweitens – sind seither die Instrumente der Wahl, gegen das Böse (Kapitalismus, Patriarchat, Rassismus) in einem selbst vorzugehen. Bis heute wird dieses Motiv in linken (inzwischen wohl weitgehend post-bis hin zu antisozialistischen) Milieus vorgetragen; die Aufforderung, eigene Privilegien zu reflektieren, scheint ein postmoderner Reflex der alten sozialistischen Selbstkritik.

6. Schluss

Das „Imperium des Bösen“, wie Ronald Reagan die Sowjetunion einst nannte, ist von der Weltbühne verschwunden. Der Sozialismus ist aktuell nur noch als historisches oder theoretisches Phänomen zu betrachten.⁸⁷ Was bleibt also vom Bösen im Sozialismus als Religion? Vielleicht einige Fragen oder Erkenntnisse, die zur generellen Vorsicht bei der Rede vom Bösen im Kontext politischen Denkens mahnen.

⁸⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft. Antisemitismus, Imperialismus, totale Herrschaft* (München: Piper, 2008).

⁸⁶ Bertolt Brecht, „An die Nachgeborenen“, <https://www.lyrikline.org/de/gedichte/die-nachgeborenen-740>, abgerufen am 20.11.2023.

⁸⁷ Das stimmt nicht ganz, denn es gibt auch aktuell Versuche, sozialistische und demokratische Gesellschaften aufzubauen, so im nordsyrischen Rojava oder andernorts auf lokaler Ebene. Vgl. dazu Christopher Wimmer, *Land der Utopie? Alltag in Rojava* (Hamburg: Nautilus, 2023). Sie spielen aber, was man bedauern mag, in den hegemonialen Debatten derzeit keine Rolle.

Eine dieser Fragen ist die danach, ob die in diesem Aufsatz diskutierten Dynamiken unvermeidlich Vorstellungen des Bösen produzieren, die dann in reifizierter Form sozial wirksam werden? Meist in der trivialen Sündenbockdynamik, in der das, was als Böses gilt, ein Opfer der vermeintlich Guten wird (wie die Hymne der SED behauptete: „Denn wer kämpft für das Recht,/ Der hat immer recht./ Gegen Lüge und Ausbeuterei. /Wer das Leben beleidigt,/ ist dumm oder schlecht./ Wer die Menschheit verteidigt,/ Hat immer recht.“⁸⁸) – oder in Form persönlichkeitszerstörender Selbstkritik? Man hätte Stalin eine Formulierung von Marx und Engels aus *Die heilige Familie* ins Stammbuch schreiben sollen: „Statt dieses Böse in sich selbst zu bekämpfen, bekämpft er es als reiner Kritiker an andern.“⁸⁹

Ein weiterer Aspekt scheint mir, dass von jeder Konstruktion des Bösen ein Handlungsappell ausgeht. Sozialistische Vorstellungen von der besseren Welt oder den besseren Menschen können das Böse nicht einfach bestehen lassen; ist Böses identifiziert, muss dagegen vorgegangen werden! Im schlimmsten Fall legitimiert die Idee des bösen Anderen dessen Tötung, im milderen Fall dessen Umerziehung – oder auch nur, die Anstrengung für die je eigene Bildung. So oder so, der Mensch ist aus sozialistischer Perspektive „handlungspflichtig“.⁹⁰ Diese Handlungspflicht richtet sich auf das Frommsche „Objekt der Hingabe“, dass je nach Orientierungsrahmen (wir erinnern uns: im Spektrum von kommunistisch zu libertär), entweder die Gesellschaft als Ganzes oder die Einzelnen sind. Während im kommunistischen Bezugsrahmen die Gesellschaft im Fokus stehen sollte, und deren Transformation, für die die Figur des Bösen, wie wir bei Marx sahen, eigentlich obsolet ist, schleicht es sich doch, da die Gesellschaft aus Individuen besteht, hinterrücks wieder ein, so dass gerade der Kommunismus dazu tendierte, das Böse im Anderen zu sehen, während die Jünger des libertären Sozialismus das Böse schon programmatisch in sich selbst und in den anderen Individuen sahen – und so weniger zum Totalitarismus als zur Bildungsarbeit neigten. Historisch unterlagen sie tragischerweise.

⁸⁸ LouisFürnberg, „Das Lied der Partei“, https://web.archive.org/web/20140822010952/http://www.hdg.de/lemo/html/dokumente/JahreDesAufbausInOstUndWest_liedtext-SEDLied/index.html, abgerufen am 21. November 2023.

⁸⁹ Marx und Engels, „Die Heilige Familie“, 220.

⁹⁰ Heinz-Joachim Heydorn, „Die Hinterlassenschaft des Jan Amos Comenius als Auftrag an eine unbeendete Geschichte“, *Acta Comeniana* XXVII, Nr. 3 (1972), 51.

Wie also ist das alles zu beurteilen? Es gibt keinen neutralen Bezugsrahmen für die Erkenntnis. Das erkennende Subjekt nimmt immer eine perspektivbedingende Position ein, daher ist es schwer, die wissenschaftliche Frage danach zu stellen, wie die Figurationen des Bösen, die im Sozialismus hervorgebracht wurden, zur Genese des „wirklich Bösen“ in der Realität sozialistischer Gesellschaften beigetragen haben. Nötig wäre dafür die Bestimmung eines intersubjektiv geteilten, vielleicht objektiv bestimmbaren Begriffs des Bösen. Ob das möglich ist, ist, wie wir gesehen haben, Thema philosophischer Debatten. Markus Gabriel und andere zumindest haben das erkenntnisoptimistische Projekt einer Neuen Aufklärung⁹¹ vorgeschlagen, das auch mit der Überzeugung einhergeht, das moralisch Gute sei für uns Menschen erkennbar⁹². Dieser Ansatz ist wichtig und notwendig in einer Zeit, in der der postmodernen Philosophie das geschehen ist, was marxischem Denken bei seiner Transformation in Marxismus geschah – die Umwandlung in ein durch und durch problematisches Glaubenssystem. In diesem Sinne mag die Beschäftigung mit dem Bösen und seiner Funktion im Rahmen des Glaubens an den Sozialismus daran erinnern, dass die Rede vom Bösen politisch für die einen vielleicht nützlich ist, für die anderen aber tödlich enden kann.

⁹¹ Markus Gabriel, Christoph Horn, Anna Katsman, Wilhelm Krull, Anna Luisa Lippold, Corine Pelluchon und Ingo Venzke, *Auf dem Weg zu einer Neuen Aufklärung. Ein Plädoyer für zukunftsorientierte Geisteswissenschaften* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2022).

⁹² Markus Gabriel, *Moralischer Fortschritt in dunklen Zeiten. Universale Werte für das 21. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2022).

The Power Dynamical Dissolution of the Logical Problem of Evil and a Foundational “Substance” for Metaethics

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This paper aims to show that the traditional problem of evil can be logically dissolved by a more thorough analysis of what love (Agape, Eros, Philia) and evil actually are. When investigated this analysis reveals that they are manifestations and evaluations of power dynamical relations leading to a conclusion that it would be logically impossible for God to be all-loving and at the same time prevent evil as all-loving constitutes an unlimited, unjudgmental, empowerment and good and evil are simply evaluations or perspectives on that power use. To stop evil God would have to disempower in some way and that would not be Agape and thus logically impossible as Agape is part of the very nature of God. This paper reveals the “form” of good to be empowerment and the “form” of bad/evil to be disempowerment.

Keywords: Problem, Evil, Power-Dynamics, Morality, Energy, Metaethics, Agape, Nietzsche

Introduction

It is said that “[a]theists list the problem of evil as their primary reason for not believing in God”.¹ This would seem to require at the very least a “natural” explanation for good and evil as it would be somewhat embarrassing to have to rely on supernatural accounts of evil to affirm your disbelief in a supernatural God. So, what exactly is the “natural” explanation for evil? This is the question that began my research into morality from a “naturalistic” perspective and to the conclusion that power dynamical relationships and “perspectives” lay at the heart of nature in general including human psychology and specifically for this essay certain human judgements. This conclusion aligned me to a large extent with the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s insight into morality as manifestations and perspectives on power. His philosophy – at least as I understand it – has proved useful in finding a path which, I claim, dissolves

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¹ See Thomas J. Oord, *The Nature of Love: A Theology* (St Louis: Chalice Press, 2010), 96.

the logical problem of evil, but far from affirming atheism as the logical outcome from the “existence” of evil, I find if anything a “naturalistic” approach can also support fundamental claims of theologians about God, principally that God is all-loving, all-powerful and all-good. It will be shown that good/evil, love and freedom are supervenient properties of, or perspectives on power-dynamical relations. In naturalistic metaethical terms this essay promotes a form of reductive realism, suggesting moral judgements are judgements of power-dynamical relations.² For much of the twentieth century any naturalistic attempt to define “good” or “evil” encountered G. E. Moore’s (1903) “Naturalistic Fallacy”/“Open Question Argument”, that was reputed to show that such terms could not be “reduced” in ways such as “the good is pleasure”, because one could always ask the question “but is pleasure good” leaving an open question and thus supposedly determining that pleasure could not be the “substance” of good. The argument doesn’t just apply to natural things however but any attempt to reduce the “good” to something else, such as “God is the good”. Moore therefore inferred that “good” was irreducible and thus “simple”.³ The argument has been less influential in recent years, encountering certain philosophical problems.⁴ Also, with the rise of scientific exploration into the realm of morality from a multitude of directions including evolutionary theory, psychology and neuroscience⁵ there is perhaps more cause for optimism that a naturalistic metaethical foundation is achievable. For me that foundation is to be found in power dynamics.⁶

² Or to put it more accurately a particular subset of power-dynamical relations.

³ See George Edward Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 35–52.

⁴ For a review of some of its problems, see Simon Kirchin, *Metaethics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 43–50.

⁵ There is a massive wealth of books and studies to draw on here but an example from each of the categories I gave are Allen Buchanan and Russell Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress: A Biocultural Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Science of Evil* (New York: Basic Books, 2011); Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (London: Penguin, 2012).

⁶ Power also applies to the fundamental “nature or essence” of God. Science and Theology (natural and supernatural) have a convergence here. This is one reason, I feel, why the theologian should remain interested in the results of this “naturalistic” approach for theological metaethical approaches too.

This “merging” of philosophy, science and theology has a long tradition – quite understandably – if one is essentially seeking some form of “truth”. If God is truth (or at least if truth is a part of God), then the search for truth must also be a search for God. This then is my fundamental theological/philosophical position. An attempt to unify different descriptions of the cosmos or “creation” and its creative forces into a coherent whole.

This essay begins that process by offering a more fundamental description and definition to concepts such as good, love, evil and freedom. One cannot of course just define things to suit one’s purpose, they have to logically cohere with other concepts within the tradition such as God and good, love, judgement, etc and the definition has to make sense, that is to say, show why such a definition is correct and preferable to current definitions⁷ and understandings.

The Problem of Evil (PoE)

I suggest that the reason for an – as-yet – unsatisfactory solution or dissolution to the PoE is that Power, Love/benevolence and Evil have usually been conceptualised as three separate, distinct and often unrelated concepts and therefore can be shown in a seemingly logical format of the now familiar kind, such as:

1. God is all-powerful.
2. God is all-loving (benevolent).
3. Evil exists.

But if evil exists, either God wants to stop evil but can’t therefore not all-powerful or God can stop evil but doesn’t therefore not all-loving. This simplified version of the PoE suffices for revealing the generally accepted formulation of the problem. This has in the past given birth to many explanations as to why God allows evil known as “theodicies”, and all manner of logical arguments from philosophers and theologians.⁸ The PoE generally reveals two types of evil, referred to as natural and moral evil. The former referring to natural occurrences such as earthquakes, floods,

⁷ In view of the recognized problem of “definitions”, mine should be regarded not as “hard” definitions, but more as an indicator of the underlying form of such concepts as good, evil, love and freedom.

⁸ See for example, Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams, eds., *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). Some solutions to the problem of evil are not categorized as “theodicies” but defences (just logical possibilities).

disease, etc and the latter to the evils which humans do to one another, such as murder, war, rape, theft, etc. Any solution or dissolution should deal adequately with both the natural and moral variants and ideally too, with the eschatological “Problem of Hell”.⁹

This paper demonstrates that a deeper consideration and conceptual analysis of the notions of love and evil reveal not just a link to power but a contingent dependence upon it. In short, that love and evil (as well as good) are themselves not “simple” concepts as G. E. Moore concluded about the “good”¹⁰ or indeed separate “things”, but manifestations and/or perspectives of a single thing, that being power dynamics and my key claim is that it is a logical impossibility to be both all-loving and to prevent evil. One can show quite simply that “good” is not a “simple” concept as Moore thought, but a term used for a power evaluation by thinking about a “good” can opener, what makes a can opener “good” is its functional efficiency and the power it gives the user over the can. We would not call it “good” if we consistently fail or struggle to open the can with it. I argue that like the functional “good” the “moral good” is a power evaluation. I make no claims here as to the underlying “nature” of the aesthetic “good”.

The argument I wish to make holds true to the idea that God is all-powerful and all-loving and omni-present but I shall argue that all-loving (Agape) means an unconditional, non-judgemental, empowerment of all and that good and evil/bad judgements are power dynamical perspectives and nothing else. That is to say good and bad/evil “exist” only as a perspective on power dynamical relations and these perspectives become possible through God’s omnipotence and omnibenevolence. For the most part I will refer to bad and evil as synonymous. To create and to love are to give other entities power which gives these entities the potential to affect others. It will be argued that empowerment and disempowerment underpin our judgements regarding good, evil and morality in general. Evil is therefore a potential logical necessity (as is good) created by an all-loving power in much the same way as a fire through its heat can be a good when it is warming you up when you’re cold or an evil when that same heat is burning you and destroying your flesh. Good

⁹ See Marilyn McCord Adams, “The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians,” in *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzman*, ed. Eleonore Stump (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 301–27.

¹⁰ Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 10.

and evil are no more existent or opposed to each other than the concepts of hot and cold. Both speak to an underlying physical reality, but hot, cold, good and evil do not exist in themselves. They are judgements of something that does exist and that is power relational dynamics or energy transfers and it is to this we now turn.

What is Power?

Michel René Barnes' study into *The Power of God* (2001) reveals the importance surrounding the concepts of power, activity, nature and works/product in regard to the Trinity in fourth-century controversies and in particular the issue of divine productivity. "The expression «one power» [δύναμις] was a traditional doctrine in Christian trinitarian writing that captured well what the specifically Nicene doctrine of one nature or essence meant..."¹¹ These power definitions stemmed from the literature of medical authors predominantly belonging to the Hippocratic school:

...power means the affective capacity (or capacities) of any given existent distinctive to the identity of that existent. This sense of power is developed in the Hippocratic literature through associating power with the concept of nature (φύσις): power is the affective capacity of the nature, or nature as affective capacity.¹²

This general definition is reflected in other more recent non-theological discourses on power such as, "...the capacity to effect (or affect) organizational outcomes"¹³ and as "...the production of intended effects."¹⁴ For this essay I will treat power similarly to the early theologians and philosophers¹⁵ as simply the capacity of an entity to affect, cause or "make things happen", or indeed stop things from happening, such as a snail's shell having an affective capacity to stop certain things eating it. Power then is the capacity to do, to cause or resist another causal agent.¹⁶

¹¹ Michel René Barnes, *The Power of God* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 1.

¹² *Ibidem*, 7.

¹³ Henry Mintzberg, *Power In and Around Organizations* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 4.

¹⁴ Bertrand Russell, *Power: A New Social Analysis* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938), 35.

¹⁵ For example, in Plato's early dialogues his understanding of "δύναμις [power] is that of an affective capacity", Barnes, *The Power*, 76.

¹⁶ We should also note how this "power" definition has similarities to the definition in physics of "energy", that being the capacity to do work. Power is work divided by time,

This allows for all existent things to have a certain level of power and not just organisms. For God to be all-powerful is to have the ability to make, cause or do anything within logical constraints, such as God cannot create the same thing to have both infinite mass and finite mass simultaneously, God cannot both unreservedly empower X whilst disempowering X simultaneously. Speaking of God as power allows us to think of God in scientific terminology: God as potential (energy or power), God as kinetic or active (energy or power) and God as actual or perceivable matter. The universe or cosmos is that which is empowered by God, from God and in God. Nothing is created that is not God, there is no other source of power or creation in the universe. If there were this would be a second God. After all, God is *all*-powerful. There can be nothing that is “outside” of God, for if there were then God would have boundaries or limits and it would be an “epitheistic” understanding of God. These ideas of God also have certain comparisons to energy,¹⁷ being that all of existence is thought to be made up of energy, that energy can be potential, kinetic, and matter and is said to inhabit empty space (vacuum) too.¹⁸ John Wesley spoke of God in “space” when he said “...the universal God dwelleth in universal space.”¹⁹

Whilst this model follows a pantheistic or panentheistic approach to articulate my thesis, the main claims in the thesis do not rely upon such a theology. God as Cosmos/Creation helps us to understand why Creation is necessarily good as confirmed in scripture where “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”²⁰ Nothing evil was created not even the serpent, everything created (empowered) was by the Will of God for whatever purpose God had in mind for his Creation. This is perhaps why – writing of Gregory of Nyssa’s theology – Barnes quotes: “We learn more about God from looking at the universe that

work also being defined as an energy transfer. So, power is an energy transfer in a given time.

¹⁷ God and energy are both thought to be “fundamental” that being something impossible to create or destroy therefore something necessary.

¹⁸ Robert Jaffe and Washington Taylor, *The Physics of Energy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 404.

¹⁹ John Wesley, Sermon 111, “On the Omnipresence of God,” <https://www.wordsof-wesley.com/libtext.cfm?srm=111>, accessed November 4, 2023.

²⁰ Gen 1:31. All biblical quotes come from *Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version, Anglicized Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

God's power created..., than from any words."²¹ This idea has scriptural support – from Jesus no less – where he says, “If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, *how* can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?”²² This seemingly necessary connection of earthly understanding to heavenly by Jesus and Gregory seems to subsume science into a form of theology. Perhaps Jürgen Moltmann expresses it best when he says:

God creates the world, and at the same time enters into it. He calls it into existence, and at the same time manifests himself through it being. It lives from his creative power, and yet he lives in it.²³

This “flow” from God to the manifested Creation or “being” is that of power. Power in potential through power transfer in the Spirit or Will (this being empowerment), to the empowered or actual “being”. God as power, God as empowering, God as empowered. The empowered is identical to the Cosmos – imbued with God's effective power – and all within it. Power is the nature and essence of God present in all three aspects which reflects Gregory of Nyssa's thought regarding the unity of God's power with God's essence, they are for Gregory one and the same thing.²⁴

So, if God's Will and “Nature” have empowered the Cosmos and all in it, and that Will and Nature is Good, from where do we get “evil”? Before we can understand this, we must look a little deeper into God's Will, Nature and Love and why God's love (Agape) is empowerment, meaning the empowering of others.

Love (Agape, Eros and Philia) as Empowerment (of others, oneself and each other)

The ancient Greeks had numerous words for love, the three most prominent were Agape, Eros and Philia. The kind of love that God is predominately in nature or essence according to the bible is Agape. “God is love” occurs twice in the New Testament 1 Jn 4:8 and 4:16 and the word translated as love is Agape. If we were to conduct a broad search for the meaning of Agape we would come across the following terms, love of “other”, unlimited love, brotherly love, a love of choice, yet spontaneous

²¹ Barnes, *The Power*, 251.

²² Jn 3:12, my emphasis.

²³ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 15.

²⁴ See Barnes, *The Power*, 260–307.

and not out of attraction or obligation, it is the highest form of love, it is charitable, that is a giving kind, it is an altruistic love not a love of self, it is divine love. Stephen Post writes: “Unlimited love, which is another way of speaking of Agape..., is universal in scope, boundless in energy, perfectly enduring, pure in motive, and wisely efficient in its application.”²⁵

Anders Nygren (1890–1978) says essentially three things about Agape as divine love, firstly it is spontaneous and unmotivated, secondly it is indifferent to value and thirdly Agape is creative.²⁶ Importantly, he writes:

It is only when all thought of the worthiness of the object is abandoned that we can understand what Agape is. God’s love allows no limits to be set for it by the character or conduct of man. The distinction between the worthy and the unworthy, the righteous and the sinner, sets no bounds to His love. “He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust” [Mt 5:45].²⁷

Remembering we are looking for a definition of what love (Agape) is, we must expunge the word love from the definitions and descriptions given to avoid a question begging definition such as “Agape (love) is unlimited love” or love is love. My argument here is that love – like “good” and “evil” – is not “simple”, it is not a “ground zero” so to speak but a term used to express something more fundamental. We find from the above plethora of descriptions that Agape is something that is given unconditionally, something unmotivated, limitless, something that is given to others, something given spontaneously, unjudgementally²⁸ and creatively.

²⁵ Stephen Post, “Nature, Grace, and Measuring *Agapé*: Science, Religion, and the «Flame of Love»,” in *Visions of Agapé: Problems and Possibilities in Human and Divine Love*, ed. Craig Boyd (London: Routledge, 2021), 33.

²⁶ Anders Nygren, “Agape and Eros,” in *Eros, Agape and Philia: Readings in the Philosophy of Love*, ed. Alan Soble (St Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1989), 85–87.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 87.

²⁸ Unjudgmental, unlimited, unconditional, unbounded and similar are for my thesis the most important characteristics for Agape so I will give them here some justification for their inclusion. Firstly, they are theologically supported by Post and Nygren in the above quotes. Secondly it is biblically supported within the same quote. Thirdly, Jesus and the apostles also advocate a teaching of non-judgement of others such as at Jn 8:15, Mt 7:1, Lk 6:37, Rom 2:1, 1Cor 4:3–5, Jas 4:11–12. Fourthly, to love judgementally is to love conditionally and as far as I can ascertain no description or definition of Agape contains such conditionality. It is not my intention to suggest that Agape is the only expression of God’s love (empowerment) of others but the most important and relevant to this thesis. I will deal with a specific case pertaining to a judgemental form of God’s love in the main text.

Let us now investigate this “something” that is given that forms the basis of Agape (love).

If God’s nature/essence is power as Gregory suggests and from the above Moltmann quote, “[it] lives from his creative power, and yet he lives in it.” And God is love from scripture then the best definition of Agape is going to be “empowerment”. A spontaneous, unlimited, unjudgmental transfer of power from God in potential to God in manifestation (the Cosmos and all within it).

This can be viewed as an energy or power transfer into new manifestations of energy such as matter, the universe and organisms. Pitirim Sorokin (1889–1968) speaking of the ontological aspects of love often refers to “love energy”, “creative energy or power” and love as a “...creative energy of goodness...” and unifying force in nature.²⁹ This “creation” of new forms is an empowering of new forms as it is an energy transfer or transformation. As Divine love is a spontaneous empowering of new forms, including “life-forms” it is not an emotional love, nor a desire or need but is best described as an unrelenting dispositional “will” to create and empower “others” which is again a definition of Agape. It is the creation by God/Energy of new manifestations of God/Energy.³⁰ Agape is an energy transfer for the creation and sustenance of new entities or forms. Agape is an expression or manifestation of power. Without power (God’s Nature) there can be no love (empowerment/ Agape).

Agape can be expressed in potential as well as actual, that is a dispositional will to empower. If we love somebody this means we are in a dispositional state of “ready to empower” when the need arises, such as when a loved one is in trouble, for example, struggling to feed themselves through poverty or sickness. If we love them and have the power to help, then this love can become “active” and “actualised” by the empowerment of giving – or imploring others to give – money or food. If we said we loved them but allowed them to go hungry this would be a contradiction.³¹ Some forms of the empowerment (love) of others are giving money, feeding them, educating them, taking care of them or helping them

²⁹ Pitirim Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1967), 6.

³⁰ With a pantheistic or panentheistic approach God and Energy can be used synonymously.

³¹ Cf. Letter of James in the New Testament.

achieve their objectives, or just by being with them in support, standing “shoulder-to-shoulder” can be empowering.

Human love however, often comes with conditions, motivations, judgements and reservations such as when someone you love is an alcoholic but also in debt and struggling to feed a family. We might judge that they may use any monies given to indulge their habit and so not empower them. Divine love, Agape, is not like this, it is unconditional, unjudgmental and spontaneous therefore makes no allowance for how the “empowered” use that power. This immediately refutes certain logical challenges to the theologian within the PoE, where it is taken that “... good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do.”³² The misconception of good and evil being in opposition is another reason why the PoE has been so difficult to resolve. For God not to allow the sun to rise or rain to fall on the evil and unjust would not only be a judgement but also a limitation on God’s love and therefore would not be Agape and thus not God. Applying limitations or judgements it seems “corrupts” Agape and thus it should be no surprise that God’s one and only commandment to Adam in the garden of Eden was to not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (moral judgement, and specifically the behavioural consequences of such a judgement).³³ And why Jesus would similarly endorse Agape and non-judgmentalism.

We should at this point briefly deal with potential objections to what may be seen as an overly “Nygrenist” interpretation of the theology of God’s love and introduce some alternative ideas in this area. Jordan Wessling introduces us to a “Value Account of God’s Love” where ultimately Wessling demonstrates the close ties between value, love and the good when he says that “God’s love is a valuing love that seeks the good of those whom are loved...” and “God’s love when directed at a person, is that which responds to the perception of a person’s intrinsic goodness by *valuing*... the existence and flourishing of that individual as well as

³² John Leslie Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” in *The Problem of Evil*, eds. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 26, first published in *Mind*, 64 (1955), 200–12; This is also unbiblical as for example where in Lk 6:35 speaking of God it is said “...he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.” Also, in Mt 5:39 “Do not resist the one who is evil.” Also see Mt 5:45 and 1 Pet 3:9.

³³ Gen 2:16–17.

union with her.”³⁴ This suggests both love and goodness have an intrinsic relation in some way with flourishing or well-being. There are three problems I see with Wessling’s thesis from the perspective of the intentions of this thesis. Firstly, Wessling makes no attempt to unify or tackle God’s love for humans and the presence of evil. Secondly, love and goodness are defined vaguely in terms of flourishing, well-being and value and thirdly, Wessling endorses the “Methodological thesis” that states that in examining notions of ideal human love we in some way access a knowledge of divine love.³⁵ It is not obvious what is meant by “ideal” in this context and by introducing a “bottom-up” approach and an evaluative approach one runs the risk of introducing human judgement into the valuation of the “loved”, adding prejudicial terms like “appropriate”³⁶ and in essence try to extrapolate from our “fallen” judgemental state to the perfect love of the Divine state. Once we introduce notions of human valuation and apply it to God, I would suggest we have already gone wrong, remembering that it is precisely our values and judgements that are at issue when it comes to salvation.³⁷ Let us look at an example to show the kind of problem I foresee in the context of promoting “ideal” well-being or flourishing from an evaluative perspective.

It could be argued that Adolf Hitler “loved” Germany and the German people, he wanted to see the German people unified, healthy, flourishing, growing and implemented social policies that he thought would lead to such an outcome. He wanted to inculcate a feeling of “oneness” among the people, give them pride in their nation and a desire to empower or love (to be in union with) the state in return. The degree to which a person was seen to want this unity with the state and its flourishing was also a measure of the value to the state/authority of that person. Those that were deemed as not contributing to, or indeed resistant to

³⁴ Jordan Wessling, *Love Divine: A Systematic Account of God’s Love for Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 39–40. (Kindle Edition).

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 19–20.

³⁶ Wessling introduces us the argument from maximal love where premise 2 states “Every maximally loving being supremely loves all entities that are appropriate candidates for this being’s supreme love.” He does go on to conclude that “God loves every human with supreme love.” *Ibidem*, 149.

³⁷ Let us not forget what “eating the fruit” implies. Taken to an extreme the “Methodological thesis” might suggest that given enough time and thought we could “save ourselves” by discovering “ideal” human love and thus divine love and practice it without the need for Jesus’ teaching, example and sacrifice.

this vision were “judged” to be of lesser worth to the state and in need of some kind of “education”, rectification, punishment or indeed annihilation. These latter practices all justified in some way by the over-arching “greater good” or flourishing of the German people. We must be very careful that our human interpretations of God, love and divine justice do not in any way resemble “Hitler’s love”. Unfortunately, some theological ideas do at times resemble this, especially some eschatological accounts. It is Hitler’s evaluation of what is valuable, essentially his judgement in conjunction with his goal of a flourishing or empowered Germany that sets up the potential for evil. This is why God’s perfect love and valuation cannot be contaminated with human notions of value or worthiness, essentially a judgement and why Jesus makes this point throughout his teaching, most notably perhaps where he says:

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect.³⁸

We therefore have to be careful with phrases such as “God punishes not in opposition to His love but as an expression of it.”³⁹ Couldn’t we say the same thing about Hitler? Hitler punishes in accordance with his values and “love”, that being a flourishing Germany. I am not suggesting Wessling intends any such outcome from his thesis or hasn’t taken measures to avoid them I am simply trying to show how invoking human ideas of “ideal” love is problematic when extrapolating back to God, even if one were to take the flourishing of the whole of humanity as your value, the judgements and subsequent actions involved in achieving it will almost certainly open the door to “evil” at least from the “perspective” of some. This is why I think Nygren is right to insist on Agape being an unjudgmental, unlimited love and it being the fundamental form of God’s love and hence the perfect form of Christian love taught by Jesus. We will now turn to another theologian critical of the conclusions of Nygren, Thomas Oord.

Oord defines love as “to act intentionally, in sympathetic/empathetic response to God and others, to promote overall well-being”.⁴⁰ We can

³⁸ Mt 5:46–48.

³⁹ Wessling, *Love Divine*, 207

⁴⁰ Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 17.

see the similarities with Wessling in the terms flourishing and well-being where I will of course argue that these definitions are too vague to be of much use and that empowerment is the foundational form underlying well-being and flourishing in its numerous manifestations, such as physical empowerment (a well-being in health), social empowerment cashed out in influence amongst conspecifics and friends, fiscal empowerment (financial well-being) which all helps to lead to a psychological well-being with perhaps spiritual empowerment being a development of will necessary to balance these individual sources of power and not to focus on one to the detriment of others. We would certainly not see someone in poverty, unhealthy and depressed as someone who is flourishing or in a state of “well-being”.

Oord lists many manifestations of love and concludes that “[a]lthough each form tells us something about what love looks like, we cannot reduce all to one form.”⁴¹ Let us look at the examples he gives to see if we cannot reduce them to “empowerment”. He first gives the parables of the good Samaritan and the prodigal son. The former being a case of multiple types of empowerment, such as physical empowerment by taking care of the wounds, but also financial empowerment by paying for the inn and social empowerment by showing the victim they are not alone. The latter (prodigal son) is fundamentally social empowerment by the father showing his joy and appreciation at the return of the son, letting the son know he still has the support (empowerment) of the family, despite his transgressions, that is to say non-judgemental. Oord reminds us that Jesus says that the greatest love that we could express would be laying down our lives for friends.⁴² A sacrifice given for the empowerment of others that may manifest as saving other lives, improving others’ lives such as in resisting oppression of a group’s power. Jesus also teaches (empowering through knowledge), heals, (empowering the body), comforts, empowering the psyche.

Oord then quotes Paul’s lines from 1 Cor 13:4–7, “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude”. If one takes an empowering attitude to people and doesn’t seek to disempower them in any way then all these things follow, patience while they are learning, speaking, thinking, etc it would be rude to interject or hurry

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 15.

⁴² Jn 15:13.

them or make fun of them. To boast is to potentially make others feel inferior to you, thus disempowering. Kindness speaks of generosity and again a disposition to empower and envy itself is an emotion of recognized inferiority and as love is an expression of power not something an empowering nature can have. Continuing with Paul's description of love: "It does not insist on its own way; but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Not insisting on your own way again comes from an empowering attitude to others. Rejoicing in truth can be seen as the empowering nature both of knowledge and of God (if God is truth). The final four items in that passage speak to the unlimited, unjudgmental nature of Agape. An empowering nature can bear and endure even things that cause it suffering and it can believe and hope without limit as there is always someone else to believe in or give hope to, essentially to empower. So, I would suggest to Oord and others to look again as to whether love can't be reduced to one fundamental form.

Oord also makes the point that Agape is not the only kind of love spoken of in the bible in reference to God's love, a point I am happy to concede. However, I will argue that both Eros and Philia have at their heart empowerment. If for example God desires union with humans and this desire is seen as Eros love we must still appreciate it is fundamentally for the empowerment of humans and not God, Eros and Agape become coincident in God. Similarly, Oord defines Philia in terms of "...seeking to establish deeper levels of cooperative friendship."⁴³ Co-operation is one of the most powerful things in nature, it is present in most if not all evolutionary accounts of morality.⁴⁴ Interdependence among a group for survival will have adaptive effects in terms of their psychology, behaviour and how they should behave toward one another, Philia then towards our friends, society and even strangers, empowers all who experience this co-operative bond.

Oord's definition of Agape supports Nygren's unlimited, unjudgmental aspects, where he uses the phrase "in spite of love" and that "Agape is the form of love promoting overall well-being in spite of the negativity

⁴³ Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 115.

⁴⁴ See for example, Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 13–44. He uses the term helping in preference to co-operation. Michael Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Morality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 9–34.

the lover faces. Agape does good in spite of evil.”⁴⁵ Using my language of this last phrase. Empowerment empowers despite disempowerment. When this is applied to God’s empowering. God empowers despite disempowerment (evil). Oord’s arguments and conclusions here lead him to a theology of “Essential Kenosis” and my dissolution of the problem of evil has much in common with his where he argues that “God’s essential nature is love. As one whose nature is love, God necessarily gives freedom and/or agency to others. God cannot withdraw, override, or fail to provide freedom/agency.”⁴⁶ If you simply change the words love for empowerment and freedom/agency for power you have the essence of my theory. Indeed, applying the foundational power “lens” as I suggest may help Oord and others with their formulations and understanding of the problem and help further their projects. In this section, I argued that love could be reduced to empowerment and that Agape means to empower unconditionally, and God’s love is fundamentally Agape. What will be shown next is that good and evil are also manifestations of power dynamics or judgements upon it.

Evil (and Good) as a Power Dynamical Evaluation or “Perspective”

Power dynamics has been ever-present in the study of ethics over the course of philosophical and theological history either explicitly as in Plato’s dialogues where Socrates debates with interlocutors such as Thrasymachus⁴⁷ and Callicles⁴⁸ or Nietzsche’s Slave and Master moralities,⁴⁹ or implicitly often “lurking” in the language or descriptions of terms like good, evil, moral, immoral, right and wrong with the author never truly aware of its absolute “sovereignty”. For example, Mary Midgley speaking of natural motives such as aggression, territoriality, etc says: “All are wide, having good aspects as well as bad ones. All are (more or less) concerned with power.”⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 56.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 126.

⁴⁷ Plato “Republic,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 336b–354c.

⁴⁸ Plato “Gorgias,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, 488b–527e.

⁴⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Genealogy of Morals,” in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* 8, eds. Alan Schrift and Duncan Large, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

⁵⁰ Mary Midgley, *Wickedness: A Philosophical Essay* (London – New York: Ark, 1986), 7.

Without a fundamental “substance” or definition of what good and evil really are authors are often forced to form question-begging or circular explanations and often employ moral terms in unhelpful, “loaded” ways within their explanations of moral phenomena. It is assumed that you basically know what good and evil are, something that philosophers who have studied it intensely, still struggle to define or define it vaguely. It is common to come across definitions or explanations for evil such as from the Neoplatonists where “...evil is a lack of being and goodness.”⁵¹ The question is begged as to what the “good” is. Disease may well be a privation of health but we must ask what is so bad about disease and good about health? Disease reduces the physical power of an organism, due to pains, fever and potentially death. Pain is often seen as an “evil” but this is incorrect, it is an indicator of damage or potential damage to the organism. Without pain organisms would – and often do⁵² – end up in a far worse state. Suffering too can have a “good” function in the maintenance of “well-being” of an organism. For example, suffering from shame, guilt or humiliation are all indicators of a loss or potential loss of social status or power for some reason and hence a motivator to make reparations and regain one’s social power. Speaking of Agape, Oord writes: “I define love as acting intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.”⁵³ The inculcation of pain and suffering in an organism promotes overall well-being through aversion to dangers, thus is itself a “good” and an act of love from God. The question of as to why didn’t God create humans invincible and immortal requires an answer to the question of God’s purpose for Creation and humanity in general, which I would suggest is unknowable and any answer would be purely speculative.

Some other general definitions of moral terms can be summarized as “[m]ost philosophers, and laypeople, assume that wrongfulness is an essential component of evil action... It seems that, to be evil, an action

⁵¹ Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (online) “The History of Theories of Evil,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concept-evil/#HisTheEvi>, accessed November 2, 2023.

⁵² Elna Nagasako, Anne-Louise Oaklander and Robert Dworkin, “Congenital Insensitivity to Pain: an Update,” *Pain* 101, no. 3 (February 2003), 213–19.

⁵³ Thomas J. Oord, “A Relational God and Unlimited Love,” in *Visions of Agapé: Problems and Possibilities in Human and Divine Love*, ed. Craig A Boyd (London – New York: Routledge, 2021), 135.

must, at least, be wrong.”⁵⁴ This now begs the question as to what “wrongness” is. We are in danger of a circular definition of the kind, “evil or bad is what is wrong, wrong is what is immoral and immorality is what is evil”. Or alternatively, “immorality is what is not moral, moral is what is right and right is what is good.” At no point are we ever any wiser as to what these terms refer to in the “real world” so to speak. It doesn’t really help to introduce “morally loaded” terms like “benefit”, or “wicked” as we would need then to justify these terms and what constitutes a “wicked” action or person or a “benefit”. Moral terms are already imbedded into the meanings of these words and so are question-begging and of limited use when it comes to trying to understand the “substance” upon which metaethics is its study. I argue that power dynamics is that very “substance”.

When considering humans and most life-forms, the obvious manifestations of power are physical power which incorporates the need to maintain homeostasis and execute physical causation such as opening a door, scratching one’s nose or defending oneself from attack. Sexual power which is the ability to attract mates or sexual partners, principally for the purpose of reproduction (but sexual power is still of equal importance to non-heterosexual persons) and for social species such as humans, social power which is the ability to gain friends and acquaintances and influence conspecifics which includes political power. Money is a proxy for power as money is something which gives us the ability to influence the world around us through conspecifics and social systems. Sociality itself is adaptive because it provides greater power to influence the world around you and this consequently improves one’s survival chances.⁵⁵ The increase in power from individual to group is important as it sets up the tension between a perceived “selfish” good and a “greater” good of the group which comes to prescribe the subset of actions seen as “moral”. The terms good and bad are also used for power evaluations of meta-represented groups. The power of these meta-represented groups is sustained with a code, law or set of rules or duties by which all can operate and

⁵⁴ Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (online), “Evil and Wrongdoing,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concept-evil/#EviWro>, accessed November 2, 2023.

⁵⁵ See e.g. Peter Corning, *The Synergism Hypothesis* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1983), 5, where he says: “It is the selective advantages arising from various synergistic effects that constitute the underlying cause of the apparently orthogenetic (or directional) aspect of evolutionary history, that is, the progressive emergence of complex, hierarchically organized systems.”

adhere, such as a duty to defend one's group or nation if necessary and to contribute by working. For example, "it is good that our church was left a large donation in someone's will", or "it is bad that our company lost that contract".

The Selfish "Good"

From the perspective of the individual "selfish" human, a decrease in power such as becoming sick and bed-ridden or losing a large sum of money is seen as a bad thing *ceteris paribus* and becoming well again or obtaining a large sum of money, or a promotion at work as a good thing. It is the increase or decrease in power that makes it good or bad.⁵⁶ With humans being social-organisms, the power evaluated is quite often not just of the individual but also of others, such as family or friends, work colleagues, etc as well as abstract entities such as nations, companies, church's, etc. Feelings, drives, pain and pleasure are, I argue, evolved mechanisms to encourage behaviour that increases or maintains one's power rather than decrease it.⁵⁷ We get hungry, thirsty and tired in order to activate behaviours that maintain our physical power, in these cases the behaviour of eating, drinking and sleeping. Embarrassment, shame and guilt act to shape and maintain our social power. We learn over the course of our lives what increases or decreases our power and our emotions are shaped by this process. We learn to fear the things that threaten our power such as threats to our physical status, for example violence and war and our social status such as examinations, public speaking or exposure to public judgement. Yet we have pleasurable feelings for gains in power such as pride for an increase in social power or a personal overcoming of a physical ailment or joy for winning the lottery or obtaining a promotion at work or wooing the sexual partner you desired. It is natural for us to want to empower

⁵⁶ It is perhaps worth noting here that there is no one "correct" perception of power. Each person's perception of their best "empowering" actions and behaviours are entirely for that individual, for example a person may well conclude that obtaining eternal life is their best course for "empowerment" and rid themselves of "worldly" wealth in favour of following Jesus in some way. This is essentially still a "selfish" motivation, although the giving to others would be seen as an altruistic act. Alternatively, someone might give up a position of great social power which is proving stressful to concentrate on health (physical power).

⁵⁷ For a further exposition of this idea see Paul Curtis, "Nietzsche's Will to Power: A Naturalistic Account of Metaethics Based on Evolutionary Principles and Thermodynamic Laws" (PhD diss., Bangor University, 2022), 107–24.

ourselves such as increasing social power by promotion at work, increase in wealth or befriending socially powerful people.

The point here is to show the underlying power dynamic that is evaluated – often sub-consciously – that constitutes the good and bad/evil judgement or intuition which also sub-consciously informs and manifests as our feelings and/or emotions.⁵⁸ Let us now turn to the two different types of evil pertinent to the PoE from our new “power” perspective.

Natural Evil

Consider a lifeless Earth, with its erupting volcanoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, etc. This is all just energy in motion, as such there is no intrinsic evil to them, hurricanes can batter mountains and volcanoes can rain down hot lava and ash onto earth or sea and nothing evil is happening. It is only when we add a life-form or “perspective” that these things become potentially evil. So, let us add simple life-forms. Whilst it is true to say that definitions of what “life” constitutes are still under discussion, my summary of its pertinent features would be that “life” principally requires three things to be called “alive”, it must be an embodied, self-sustaining or “autonomous” agent, it must metabolise, that is to say be an energetic process, it takes in energy, uses it to maintain itself and in the process degrades that energy to a lower energetic level such as heat and other waste. Thirdly, it must be able to replicate.⁵⁹ As an energy transferring “mechanism” it is also a manifestation of power, it affects the world around it, and can be affected by the world around it. Any degradation in a life-form’s ability to maintain this process will be a loss of power and will be a bad thing from the perspective of that life-form due to the consequential loss of survival potential (although it should be realised it cannot directly perceive survival potential). Anything that maintains or increases its ability to maintain itself will be seen as a good thing from its perspective such as finding a large cache of food. Likewise, should a

⁵⁸ See Robert Solomon, *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Indiana: Hackett, 1993), 209, who argued that emotions are evaluative judgements of gains or losses, “good” and “evil” or “right” and “wrong”. In this sense I agree with him and suggest exactly what “substance” is evaluated to provide that kind of judgement.

⁵⁹ For discussion, see Freeman Dyson, *Origins of Life* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999); Andy Pross, *What is Life: How Chemistry Becomes Biology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Paul Nurse, *What is Life: Understanding Biology in Five Steps* (Oxford: David Fickling Books, 2020).

volcano now rain down hot lava onto this life-form destroying it, we can see this as a bad thing meta-representing its perspective.

Consequently, good and evil only exist from the perspective of those life-forms capable of such an evaluation. A “life-form” or organism is a self-sustaining energetic process that needs certain requirements in order to self-sustain (exist). From the perspective of a carrot or pig, humans would be a natural evil as we rip vegetables up from the ground and breed and slaughter pigs to maintain the energetic process that is us. Natural evil is therefore an energetic transfer of one type (volcano, virus or life-form) that threatens the energetic process of a life-form. These are all simply perspectives on power dynamical interactions.

This is no less true for the human perspective. We think of these natural processes as evil because they can harm or destroy the energetic process that is us (injury or death) or disempower us in some other way such as destroying our homes and other property. If humans and their property were indestructible then these powerful energetic processes such as earthquakes and tornadoes, would not be seen as any eviller than a white fluffy cloud, or a light breeze on a summer’s day.

What we see as natural evil are simply things that can affect us detrimentally, that is to say detract from our power, such as disease. Other natural processes can not only affect our physical power but also by destroying our property and infrastructure they affect the functioning – and therefore – power of the city or state, as well as the financial cost of replacement and repair of personal or state-owned property. As money is a proxy for power any loss of money is a loss of power. Similarly, the “good” will be a gain or maintenance of power. If volcanoes spewed out gold and diamonds, we would view them very differently in terms of good and evil, even if they did kill people from time to time.

I have argued that natural good and evil are power dynamical perspectives, that is to say a simple judgement. A judgement that is so important evolutionarily that it would be “hard-wired” through evolution by natural selection (God’s creative, empowering process) into the central nervous system and psychological make-up of life-forms, making this judgement an over-arching value upon which to act. An assessment of what can affect you and what you can affect would be fundamental to any evolving organism long before they had the mental capacity to understand a concept as complex as “life” or “survival” and act upon it. It will now be argued that moral evil is also a power dynamical evaluation.

Moral Evil

Once we have assimilated the power dynamical perspective in relation to natural evil and how nature affects us it becomes easy to see how the same applies to humans and how we affect each other. As energy in motion seemingly constitutes the whole of existence, any organism (autonomous bio-chemical energetic process) must be able to evaluate these energy transfers as well as other organisms and their power potential. It is especially important for an organism to be able to evaluate what it can affect and what effects it. An organism is thus also a power evaluator and anything that maintains or increases power will be good and anything that decreases it will be bad *ceteris paribus*.

The “moral” judgement comes about due to the fact that we are no longer “selfish” organisms but part of an interdependent group or “social organism”, which is a more powerful entity and thus provides adaptive advantages. Feelings and emotions along with empathy, theory of mind, imagination and reason help us to understand what others are feeling and their requirements. If you were to contract a disease and I were to “empower” you in some way, such as doing your shopping and feeding you, providing company and care, etc this would be seen as a “morally good” act. I am using my power for your empowerment; I am empowering you. If on the other hand it was I that intentionally gave you the disease in the first place this would be seen as an immoral act as I am intentionally disempowering you. Similarly, if you were hungry but had no money to buy food, it would be a good, moral act to give you money or food as this is an empowerment. To steal someone’s money would be seen as evil and immoral as it is a disempowerment *ceteris paribus*. The choice between empowering oneself (or one’s group) at the expense of others (or other groups), or empowering others at the expense of oneself or group, lies at the heart of moral good and evil judgements. Anyone who deliberately sets out with the intention of decreasing my power such as stealing from me, injuring me, killing me, etc will be seen as bad or evil by me and due to empathy and our ability to meta-represent, also by others. Anyone who intends to maintain or increase the power of another will be seen as good.⁶⁰ The classic example of helping an elderly person cross the road is

⁶⁰ This would be further qualified by judgements of whether the empowered person is likely to use this power for empowering or disempowering others. Such as giving money would be a good, but giving money to the Nazi party in the 1930s would entail further power evaluative processes in order to ascertain whether your donation is contributing

essentially an energy transfer, the use of one person's power to enhance another's, as is caring, donating money, etc. Because there are different manifestations of power to evaluate (sexual, physical, etc) and different power domains to meta-represent such as other people, animals, groups, etc this is why moral dilemmas are quite frequent and applied ethics can be such a "minefield" to navigate.

The distinction between the selfish "good" and the "moral" "good" is basically distinguished by the "flow" of the power relation. With the moral good, power "flows" away from the actor to another, with the selfish "good" power "flows" toward the actor from another. Immorality is often seen when the individual increases, maintains or expresses their power at the expense of another or the group and morality is often seen when the individual decreases their power for the benefit (empowering) of another or the group.

The immoral thus act similarly in a social organism as a cancerous cell to an organism, taking power and resources from the group for their own benefit (empowerment) or ignoring the rules and/or values that serve to maintain the power of the group. They put the "selfish good" ahead of the good of others. For example, a player in a football team has a "duty" to play their best (expend energy and use their power) and contribute to the success of the team. If a player steps up to take a penalty in an important game like a world cup final and misses, this will be seen as bad from the perspective of the player, team and its fans but not immoral. If it is missed deliberately for selfish reasons such as "match-fixing" it will be seen as immoral as the player profits from the action at the expense of the team, fans and bookmakers. If found out, that player will lose social power and this is one reason our immoralities are – where possible – kept secret.

The selfish good – like the cancerous cell – however has a "myopic" view as in both cases the action may well bring about their ultimate demise, the death of the organism supporting the cancer and thus the death of the cancerous cell too and the selfish actor contributes to the potential weakening and "death" of the social organism which it parasitises. Whilst the "selfish" footballer in the above example only contributes to the weakening of the team and potential losses, in a large social organism such as a nation "selfish" parasitisation of the accumulated wealth generated by that nation by a comparative few can lead to people struggling to

to the empowerment of those who wish to disempower others, and hence an evil. This would be a judgemental or conditional empowerment and not Agape.

afford food, energy and shelter, leading to resentment, anger and potential social organism breakdown as “selfishness” becomes seen as the more rewarding strategy abandoning the rules, values and norms that maintain the social system.

A second example of good/bad, moral/immoral being a power perspective is with the action of rape. Two consenting adults having sex together is not usually considered as an evil, in fact quite often as a good thing. However, change the power dynamic slightly, such as one of them not consenting and now this becomes an evil, immoral act. The only difference is the power perspective, one person is now over-powering and the other being over-powered in some fashion. It is therefore my contention that all judgements of good and bad/evil, moral and immoral are fundamentally power dynamical evaluations.⁶¹ Having made the argument that good and evil/bad are evaluative perspectives on power relations and God’s love “Agape” is empowerment, let us now return to the PoE and see it in this new light.

Reformulating the Problem of Evil

If we accept that love (Agape) is unrestricted, unconditional empowerment and good and evil are simply judgements of power relational perspectives, then we firstly can see that good and evil do not exist in any distinct existential way and are merely concepts relating to a “local” judgement of a certain kind of energy transfer and its effects.

The PoE now looks like this:

1. God is all-powerful
2. God is all-empowering
3. Disempowerment (pain, suffering, death, loss of sexual attraction, money and property, etc) can be a consequential effect from interactions of empowered entities.

This is not to suggest that God in some way is losing power but “loaning” power to created entities by empowerment logically entails that entity can affect a power transfer of its own and this could be both

⁶¹ At least in the functional and moral senses of the words, I do not here extend the thesis to the aesthetic uses of the words. Also, some might choose to make a further distinction about evil or “pure” evil from merely “bad” that goes to the intention and even personality of a person, if such a distinction is to be made, I would argue it would be for a person who is disposed to “disempower” others in some way purely for the psychological joy of manifesting their power in this way. The opposite of Agape.

detrimental or beneficial to itself and other entities. Where the terms detriment and benefit relate to power loss or acquisition respectively. This has certain features in common with the “freewill” theodicy only at a more fundamental level of explanation. Where “freewill” is the propagation of one’s power in the world as one sees fit.⁶² This freedom to express one’s power could therefore be used to enhance one’s own power, potentially to the detriment of others’ power (bad/evil or immoral), or used to enhance another’s power to the detriment of one’s own power (good, moral). This choice is where we perceive the “opposition” in good and evil.

Once we understand that love and evil are manifestations and judgements on power relations the traditional PoE dissolves. It becomes a logical impossibility for God to empower others unreservedly whilst at the same time trying to reserve or restrict the use of that power. Evil is a potential logical consequence of Agape (love).

Agape and the Good

With the “moral good” being the empowerment of others we can see why Agape and the good are coincident, they are the same thing and why God is love is identical to God is good. It is because God is empowering others. It is now obvious why early Christian teaching stresses this unconditional (divine) love. This would be an empowering of others regardless of any “moral” judgement of them.

Paul reiterates this “love” many times as the foundation, perhaps no more explicitly than where he writes:

Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”⁶³

An appeal not to waste your power on your own selfish wants or desires. The First Epistle of John also makes numerous similar points. “See what

⁶² It should be noted that “freewill” is not a necessary constituent feature of the above thesis, the thesis also supports a fatalistic perspective. In addition, others have defined freewill (perhaps inadvertently) in power-dynamical terms such as Kevin Vanhoozer who writes “God causes creaturely causality, which in the case of humans, means freedom.” Kevin Vanhoozer, “Love Without Measure,” in *Love Divine and Human: Contemporary Essays in Systematic and Philosophical Theology*, eds. Oliver Crisp, James Arcadi and Jordan Wessling (London – New York – Dublin: T&T Clark, 2021), 24.

⁶³ Gal 5:13–14.

kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God; and so we are.”⁶⁴

The early Christian writers saw the importance of embracing this “holy spirit” of empowerment (Agape). To empower unconditionally has certainly not been something “Christians” have adhered to judging by church history, or for that matter just about everyone else. Judgement always seems to creep in, even for the gospel writers, for example: “Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person.”⁶⁵ John here is ironically rejecting all those without the teaching of Christ who taught unjudgmental love of enemies and friends alike. John seems to be unwittingly rejecting himself from his own house.

We tend to only empower those we think “worthy” – as John in the above quote – and actively disempower those we think deserve it. Examples would be our giving to charity or “worthy” causes and “cancel culture” disempowering those we see as wrong or immoral. To put it bluntly, we judge others and act according to the judgement, we “eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”. Not to do so would indeed be an incredible leap of faith. This “judgement” being an imposition of our own values and ideologies on others in addition to our own selfish desire to increase our power at the expense of others is what keeps us from fully embracing Agape (divine love) and is probably the reason we have the “moral” problems we have.⁶⁶

We can never be in possession of God’s perspective or knowledge of God’s purpose for Creation but we can have faith in the fact that as good and evil is a matter of perspective, God created nothing evil and it fulfils God’s purpose exactly as intended, that is to say it is functionally good. If the “good” and Agape are identical (empowerment of others) then evil is a potential consequence of good and only opposed in the definitional sense that it is the disempowerment of others *ceteris paribus*. In order to do good or evil one must have the power to do it, to have the power one must be empowered, to be empowered is to be loved, ultimately to receive God’s love/power. Once this is grasped it can be seen that there is no theological “problem of evil”, just the consequences of unlimited love.

⁶⁴ 1 Jn 3:1. See also 1 Jn 3: 16–18.

⁶⁵ 2 Jn 7: 10–11

⁶⁶ Such as seemingly never-ending “tit-for-tat”, “eye for an eye” exchanges. Again, it is no wonder Jesus taught a policy of forgiveness as this breaks that cycle.

Theological Consequences of the Power-Dynamical Thesis

There are theological consequences for good and evil essentially being judgements of power and how one uses it and Agape as unjudgmental empowerment. Some might be more welcome than others depending on one's theology. The main one is the abandonment of evil as an opposing metaphysical force personified in the rather cartoonish figure of the devil or Satan. Satan can once again be the Old Testament tempter or tormenter under the guidance and authority of God, part of God's purpose and not something metaphysically opposed to God. I think this should be welcomed however as the traditional understanding of Satan in metaphysical opposition to God yet in some way co-operating in eternal punishment of the damned in Hell seems – to say the least – incoherent. James Matarazzo agrees when he says: "I therefore argue against salvific dualism on the grounds that it severely damages the coherence of the doctrine of God and eternalizes evil in the eschatic realm."⁶⁷ If the majority of humanity is damned to an eternity of punishment under Satan in Hell, then what exactly is Christ's victory over evil? This particular "problem of evil" is thus removed with this thesis. Which leads to the following potential consequence.

Remembering Agape meant unjudgmental, charitable, altruistic and unmotivated empowerment, perhaps the most unpalatable consequence for some comes from this very attribute. With no judgement comes no punishment or reward. Perhaps we should start to see the concepts of Heaven and Hell not as after-life destinations for the "judged", but consequential future world states depending on whether we adopt the "holy spirit" of Agape or continue to be self-serving and judgemental.⁶⁸ The dissolution of the logical PoE as outlined above leaves the theologian with a new "Problem of Judgement". Can God be both unjudgmental in the Agape sense and then change to be judgemental in the after-life reward and punishment sense? Matarazzo does offer a potential answer to this conundrum suggesting that love is the judgement and uses the phrase "to

⁶⁷ James Matarazzo Jr, *The Judgement of Love: An Investigation of Salvific Judgment in Christian Eschatology* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2018), xi.

⁶⁸ Jesus hints at this latter idea in Lk 17:20–21 "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, «Look, here it is!» or «There it is!» For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." That is to say, I would argue, as a community (perhaps global) founded on and sustained in Agape.

be judged is to be saved.”⁶⁹ Thus God’s judgement is empowering (loving), perhaps suggesting to us how we ought to judge, in that we should always seek the empowerment of others even in our judgements, rather than a disempowering punitive action. Certainly, more work needs to be done in teasing out the intricacies, problems and distinctions contained in judgemental empowerment as opposed to the unjudgmental empowerment I have thus far championed.

Conclusion

It has been argued that the Problem of Evil is only a problem because we haven’t ever really understood the nature of love (Agape) and evil itself and once this has been exposed as manifestations and evaluations of power dynamics the PoE dissolves. It dissolves because for God to be all-loving, this has the identical meaning of God being all-empowering, to empower “nature” itself including organisms such as humans is to create an interaction of power-dynamical entities with perspectives. Good and bad/evil are terms we give to perspectives on power-dynamical evaluations. Morality/immorality is also a specific sub-set of these power-dynamical evaluations due to us being individual actors in an interdependent social organism. Thus, it becomes a logical impossibility for God to both empower without limit (Agape) and restrict the power (limit) of those persons or things that do evil (disempower). This thesis has much in common with the freewill theodicy and Oord’s “Essential Kenosis”, however, the power-dynamical thesis gets to the very metaphysical roots of what is the essence of good, evil, love and even freewill itself, giving us a much better understanding of these concepts. It also deals with natural evil, which the freewill theodicy does not and relates it to moral evil. This thesis also doesn’t depend on freewill, so will still be relevant to determinists and resilient to possible new learning that may refute freewill or at least modify our understanding of it in the future.

This essay has also shown how we can blend a theistic approach with a naturalistic metaethical theory, that places all good and evil, moral and immoral judgements within the sphere of physical evaluations of power. The suggestion also being that these evaluations are so fundamental to life-forms that their entire psychologies would be centred around them from unconscious evaluations to the values that underpin basic feelings

⁶⁹ Matarazzo, *The Judgement of Love*, xi.

and emotions to reason and imagination, all employed in the business of helping to increase the power of oneself or another entity, such as a social group.

Whether we have to adopt the theological consequences of the thesis I have laid out above is a matter for further theological debate, however the basic thesis of power dynamics being at the heart of metaethics and good and bad/evil judgements is something that I think needs further examination and philosophical and theological thought. It was something Nietzsche proposed in the latter half of the Nineteenth century and something that I don't believe has received adequate philosophical/scientific or theological treatment thus far. At the very least the above can show the kind of process necessary to dissolve this long-standing problem, that being a deeper conceptual analysis of what love and evil (and good) actually are.

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The Problem of Evil and the Simulation Hypothesis

CHRISTOPHE FACAL*

I argue that the Problem of Evil diminishes the likelihood of the simulation hypothesis being true. In section 1, I present the simulation hypothesis. In section 2, I present the Problem of Evil and how it can be addressed to the simulation hypothesis. In section 3, I strengthen my claim by defending the idea that, on the grounds of the expansion of the moral circle, we can infer that potential simulators would most probably view simulated beings as moral subjects. Section 4 is dedicated to counterarguments and their responses, and section 5 contains a conclusion where I clarify the probabilistic nature of my argument.

Keywords: *Problem of Evil, Simulation Hypothesis, Moral circle expansion, simulation theology*

Introduction

I argue that the Problem of Evil diminishes the likelihood of the simulation hypothesis being true. In section 1, I will present the simulation hypothesis. In section 2, I will present the Problem of Evil and how it can be addressed to the simulation hypothesis. In section 3, I will strengthen my claim by defending the idea that, on the grounds of the expansion of the moral circle, we can infer potential simulators would most probably view simulated beings as moral subjects. Section 4 is dedicated to counterarguments and their responses, and section 5 contains a conclusion where I clarify the probabilistic nature of my argument.

1. The Simulation Hypothesis

The simulation hypothesis was first formulated in a 2003 article by Nick Bostrom, and most recently by David Chalmers. I will present both versions of the simulation hypothesis.

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1.1 Bostrom's version of the simulation hypothesis

Bostrom's version of the simulation hypothesis takes the form of a triple disjunction. In his original paper, Bostrom specifically talks about *ancestor* simulations, but these are technicalities we do not need to bother ourselves with for our present purpose. Here is thus a simplified version of Bostrom's argument:

1. Either every intelligent civilization disappears before reaching the technological stage required to run large-scale computer simulations.
2. Or, almost every intelligent civilization refuses to run such simulations even though they have acquired the technological means to do so.
3. Or, we might be living in a computer simulation.

His argument ought to be understood in the following way: at least one of the three disjuncts necessarily must obtain. If scenario 1 or 2 obtains, scenario 3 cannot obtain. But, if scenarios 1 and 2 do not obtain, then scenario 3 must obtain. If scenario 1 does not obtain, this means some civilizations will reach the technological stage required to run large-scale computer simulations. If scenario 2 does not obtain, these civilizations will create some simulations. Therefore, we must grant the possibility that our world might be that simulation. The question is: do we have any reason to believe scenarios 1 or 2 will obtain? Let's examine both the first and second disjunct in turn and see if we have any reason to believe they do obtain, blocking the possibility of disjunct 3 obtaining.

1.1.1 Is it likely civilizations end before creating large-scale simulations?

For this first scenario to obtain, all possible civilizations must end before reaching such a technologically advanced state. This implies an event that would necessarily wipe out all possible intelligent civilizations before they reach this stage. Even if it were the case that *our* civilization could disappear before reaching this stage, in order to say *all and any possible* civilization would necessarily suffer the same fate, we would have to identify some sort of Great Filter, a Great Wall or a Civilizational Barrier which necessarily prevents any possible civilization from reaching such a

technological stage. But no such thing has ever been identified, nor do we seem to have any reason to believe such a thing would exist.¹

1.1.2 Is it likely all possible civilizations choose not to run simulations?

For the second disjunct to obtain, every intelligent civilization that would reach the technological state required to run large-scale simulations would have to converge towards the decision not to run such simulations. Moreover, those civilizations would need to be able to enforce this prohibition efficiently, without anyone deciding to run simulations by themselves. Again, this scenario is not impossible, but is it probable? If we can deduce anything from our current fondness for simulations, which we constantly use nowadays for a diverse set of uses, whether they be for medical purposes, meteorological or logistical planning, research, decision-making or entertainment, it is quite unlikely that intelligent and technologically advanced civilizations will decide not to run simulations. Given their usefulness, advanced civilizations will most likely not prohibit simulations. But even if they do prohibit simulation, there is no guarantee that this prohibition can be effectively enforced.

Bostrom's conclusions thus naturally follow: if we have no conclusive reason to say scenarios 1 and 2 would obtain, then scenario 3 remains an open possibility, and we consequently have to grant the possibility that we might be living in a simulation. How likely is this? Bostrom does not say how much credence we should lend to each disjunct, but the credence one ascribes to the simulation hypothesis should be proportional to the credence we lend to each of the three disjuncts.² In other words, Bostrom's argument establishes that if we grant some likelihood to the possibility of simulations being created one day (of disjuncts 1 and 2 not

¹ On existential risks, Nick Bostrom, "Existential Risks. Analyzing Human Extinction Scenarios and Related Hazards," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* (2002): 16, says the following: "But the balance of evidence is such that it would appear unreasonable not to assign a substantial probability to the hypothesis that an existential disaster will do us in. My subjective opinion is that setting this probability lower than 25% would be misguided, and the best estimate may be considerably higher." Toby Ord, *The Precipice: Existential Risk and the Future of Humanity*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 480, who wrote the most comprehensive book on the probability of existential risks, gives a probability of 1/6 per century that humanity goes extinct. But again, these existential risks concern our civilization, and are not exportable to any possible civilization.

² I thank an anonymous reviewer of RES for this insightful comment.

obtaining), we must grant proportional likelihood to the possibility that we might be living in a simulation (disjunct 3 obtaining).

1.2 Chalmer's version of the simulation hypothesis

Chalmers' version of the simulation hypothesis runs along a different line. Chalmers builds a statistical argument which emphasizes the proportion of non-simulated beings (*nonsim*) versus simulated beings (*sim*):

Any nonsim population that survives long enough will eventually be able to create (let's say) at least a thousand sim populations, each with about as many sims as the original nonsim population. It's arguable that at least one in ten human-level nonsim populations will eventually do this. If one in ten nonsim populations creates at least a thousand sim populations each, this will result in at least a hundred sim populations per nonsim population. If this is right, then throughout the cosmos, sims will outnumber nonsims by at least a hundred to one.³

Therefore, it is more likely that we are simulated beings. This version of the argument is more straightforward. It is likely an intelligent civilization will one day be running enormous number of simulations, populated by a large number of simulated beings. If any intelligent civilization does reach that stage, it's not a stretch to think simulated beings (*sims*) will vastly outnumber non-simulated beings (*nonsims*): the fact that there are so much more *sims* than *nonsims* commits us to acknowledge we have more chances of being *sims* than *nonsims*. Therefore, there are non-negligible chances we live in a simulation.

1.3 Objections to the simulation hypothesis

We will now briefly review the possible objections to the simulation hypothesis and highlight how they fall short of the mark.

Chalmers places the objections to the simulation hypothesis in two categories: sim-blockers and nonsim signs. Objections of the "sim-blockers" type point to the impossibility of our world being simulated (they *block* the simulation hypothesis). They are, generally speaking, things which would exist in the (hypothetical) universe of our simulators that would prevent them from building simulations. Nonsim signs objection are more of a probabilistic nature: they are things in our universe which seem to point towards the fact that we do not live in a simulation. Sim blockers objections are of the following kind:

³ David Chalmers, *Reality* (New York City: Norton, 2022), 81.

Simulation is impossible, simulation is too difficult, nonsims populations will all die before creating sims, nonsims will choose not to make simulations.⁴ (...) And nonsim sign objections are of the following kind: “Sims can’t be conscious! (...) Simulators will avoid creating sims (...). Sims won’t have minds like ours (...) Sims won’t experience large universes.”⁵

We will here study three objections. The first is a nonsim sign: there are some things in our world that cannot be simulated on a computer, namely consciousness. The second objection is a sim blocker: it is impossible for computers to reach a computational power sufficient to simulate our universe. The third objection is a nonsim sign: our universe is too vast and complex to be a simulation.

1.3.1 Some objects of our world cannot be simulated

This first objection contends that some objects of our world cannot be simulated on a computer. The possibility of simulated objects is easily satisfiable for most objects: it seems pretty easy to simulate a rock or a chair. But things get trickier when we come to objects such as our consciousness. We have failed, up until now, to create an artificial consciousness, and many think this might be impossible due to the nature of consciousness itself.

However, adherents of the simulation hypothesis think consciousness could be simulated. If consciousness depends not on the infrastructure from which it emerges but on the organization of said infrastructure, any system, whether carbon-based and biological or silicone-based and digital, could theoretically be conscious. This view is called reductionist functionalism. It argues for the substrate independence of consciousness, which is only determined by the causal organization of a system, notwithstanding what this system is made of (*functionalist aspect*), and the mind can be reduced to the physical process happening inside the brain (*reductivist aspect*). If a biological brain produces consciousness, it is thanks to how the neurons connect through electric impulses. If a computer were to imitate the internal organization of the brain, the computer, or the software run on said computer, could also be conscious. Even if the reductivist component is removed, a non-reductivist functionalist still holds that a computer could simulate consciousness. They will argue that

⁴ *Ibidem*, 86.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 92–5.

conscious states are not the same thing as the physical states upon which they occur, but they are nonetheless correlated with them to the extent that replicating these physical states with a different infrastructure than a human brain would result in a consciousness identical to that of a biological brain.⁶ In other words, the physical processes inside the mind cannot wholly explain the mind and all its conscious experiences. Therefore, there is no reductionism, but they are nonetheless strongly correlated with them, to the extent that replicating, on another medium, the physical processes found inside the brain, would produce consciousness. If functionalism is adopted, then the problem of simulating consciousness does not seem impossible to overcome, and the objection that it is impossible to simulate a consciousness does not hold.

1.3.2 Computers couldn't possibly be powerful enough

This objection contends that simulating our universe would necessitate computational power way beyond any possible computer. Again, this objection seems misguided.

Granted, we currently do not have any computer powerful enough to run simulations of complete universes populated by conscious beings. However, there seems to be no reason to place an upper bound to the increase of our computational power. Currently, the most powerful supercomputer, OLCF-5, can perform around 10^{18} operations per second, or 1.102 quintillion operations per second. While we do not know precisely what our brains performance in operations per second, the best estimates put it in a similar range⁷: our most powerful computers are likely already powerful enough to match a human brain in terms of computational power. IBM recently announced their first quantum computer. In a few years, the numbers discussed above will probably already be outdated. Quantum computation seems to be on the brink of a vast and rapid expansion.⁸ If such computers are indeed developed, then placing a low upper bound on computational power seems a doubtful move. Of course,

⁶ David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind. In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁷ Nick Bostrom and Anders Sandberg, "Whole Brain Emulation: A Roadmap," Technical Report #2008-3, Future of Humanity Institute, Oxford University, <https://www.fhi.ox.ac.uk/brain-emulation-roadmap-report.pdf>, accessed December 03, 2022.

⁸ Paul Smith Goodson, "IBM Announces New 400 Qubit Quantum Processor Plus Plans For A Quantum-Centric Supercomputer," *Forbes*, November 9, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/moorinsights/2022/11/09/ibm-announces-new-400-qubit-quantum->

there are upper limits to computational power.⁹ These limits are generally thought to be imposed by the physical limits of our universe. Still, it is unknown if they occur *before* the computational power required to run large-scale simulations. The possibility of computers reaching the computational power required to run large-scale simulations thus remains open.

1.3.3 Our universe is too vast to be a simulation

This third objection contends that our universe is extraordinarily vast, and this vastness seems to be a nonsim sign. The observable universe is more or less 90 billion light-years wide, could be filled with a trillion trillion stars, and has an astonishing level of complexity, ranging from subatomic particles to supermassive black holes. Whatever the simulation's purpose, a much less detailed and smaller simulation could do the job, and the vastness of our universe would be unnecessary.

There are two possible responses to this objection. First, the next universe up is so much vaster than ours, that it could potentially have the necessary resources to simulate our universe. Second, the largeness of our universe might be illusory, the far-away parts being simulated only when we are observing them, making our simulation a "shortcut simulation". Just as videogames do not generate the whole world at every moment of play, but only the parts of the world the players have access to at the present moment, the simulation could be fine-grained only when a simulated person, namely us, is observing this particular part of the simulation, and as when a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, or when no one is observing a far-away celestial body, the simulation would spare the computational power necessary to simulate the sound of the tree or the presence of said celestial body.

In this section, we have presented the two main versions of the simulation hypothesis. This hypothesis is defensible, it is plausible, and it seems to have strong answers to every objection that could be presented against it.¹⁰ This being said, I contend it is possible to formulate an ob-

processor-plus-plans-for-a-quantum-centric-supercomputer/?sh=1694191eaa99, accessed December 03, 2022.

⁹ Anders Sandberg, "The Physics of Information Processing Superobjects: Daily Life Among the Jupiter Brains," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 5, no. 1 (1999): 1–34.

¹⁰ There are some more objections to the simulation hypothesis, but it is outside the scope of this paper to discuss them all. We do however signal the objection by Michael

jection inspired by the Problem of Evil, which reduces its likelihood of being true.

2. The Problem of Evil

Since the simulation hypothesis was first formulated, it has been examined in light of the Problem of Evil to different effects. I will start by presenting what exactly is the Problem of Evil, and then I will show the many ways in which these two ideas have met.

2.1 The Problem of Evil

The Problem of Evil, in a nutshell, goes as follows: If a Deity is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good, why is there evil in the world?

Our world is plagued by evils such as infants dying from atrocious diseases and innocent people suffering from natural disasters. Could a God that is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, design such a world? Logically, no. If God is good, then he cannot want those evils to be. If he is omniscient, then he is aware of those evils. If he is omnipotent, then he could eliminate those evils. But these evils haven't been eliminated. Therefore, it follows that God, as described, does not exist, or at least that the probability of his existence is significantly reduced.

Of course, there are evils that result from human actions (murder, torture, genocide, theft, rape, and so on) and evils that are not the result of human actions (natural disasters, illness, death). The Problem of Evil concerns both kinds of evils, and one can thus talk of two kinds of problems of evils: the problem of moral evil and the problem of natural evil. This being said, one could argue the Problem of Evil is more poignant when the focus is placed on natural evils (we will shortly see why). The 1755 Lisbon earthquake is paradigmatic. On the morning of November

Huemer against the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis, who says it is so unlikely, if we were brains in vats, that our sensory experiences would be as they are now, that we can dismiss the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis; Sean Carroll's resolution objection, who says that if we accept the simulation hypothesis, we also have to accept the fact that it is then more likely than not that there are a chain of simulation (a simulation, in a simulation, and so on), and us being in the bottom, because we don't yet have the capacity to run simulations, would have to mean that our universe would have to be of very low resolution, which is not, thus dismissing the simulation hypothesis; and finally Eric Feras' objection who says that because we have access to the smallest possible scale of physical reality, that being the Planck time, this proves we do not live in a simulation, because our supposed simulators would then have to have access to a broader scale than us, which is here impossible, as the Planck time is the theoretically smallest time physically possible.

1st, 1755, a great earthquake hit Lisbon, causing chaos, subsequent fires and tsunamis, and was responsible for the death of around 12,000 people.¹¹ No human action could be blamed for this event, and the only guilty party seemed to be God. This evil didn't seem to serve any purpose. Its occurrence seemed to be a brute fact of our world and happened simply because our world unfolded in accordance with natural laws, in this instance, tectonic laws. If those evils are woven into the natural laws of our world,¹² then the case can be taken up to the designer of our world. And it is hard to see why God would have created the world this way. Therefore, it seemed that either God was not as traditionally described, or that he was not at all.

Theodicies have tried to explain away the Problem of Evil in many different fashions. Free-will theodicies¹³ may work well for moral evils, but their efficacy in dispelling the dangers posed by the problem of natural evils is less certain.¹⁴ Different types of theodicies have thus been developed to try to explain away the existence of evil in our world, without jeopardizing the belief in the existence of God. Classical ones include diabolical and fall theodicies.

Diabolical theodicies place the responsibility of natural evils on demonic forces. Beings more powerful than us yet inferior to God, like Satan, would be responsible for many of the natural evils of our world. As for fall theodicies, they claim that natural evils are the deserved consequences of

¹¹ Joao F. B. D. Fonseca, "A Reassessment of the Magnitude of the 1755 Lisbon Earthquake," *Bulletin of the Seismological Society of America* 110, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1785/0120190198>.

¹² David Kyle Johnson, "The Failure of Plantinga's Solution to the Logical Problem of Natural Evil," *Philo* 15, no. 2 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.5840/philo20121528>.

¹³ Alvin Plantinga's Free Will Defense goes like this: "A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He can't cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely. To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so. As it turned out, sadly enough, some of the free creatures God created went wrong in the exercise of their freedom; this is the source of moral evil. The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good." See Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 166–67.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*. See also James Sterba, *Is a Good God Logically Possible?* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

human actions which caused the biblical Fall. Fall theodicies do not need to accept every detail from the biblical account, but generally explain natural evils by “human beings[’s] falling away from right relationship with God, whatever the exact details of that Fall”.¹⁵ However popular these kinds of theodicies were in the past,¹⁶ they do not today garner as much sympathy today. As Dainton points out, “the progress of natural sciences over the past three centuries has been such that there is very little room left for supernatural interventions in the natural order”,¹⁷ and if we have to choose between, say, what geology tells us about the causes of earthquakes and some alternative explanation according to which earthquakes would be caused by the action of malevolent forces, it is more reasonable to accept the former. However commonsensical this critique might seem, not everyone thinks it succeeds in discrediting diabolical theodicies.¹⁸

Modern theodicies employ a different route and generally try to lessen the dangers posed by the problem of Evil by attacking its logical structure. Two major examples are Alvin Plantinga and Peter Van Inwagen.

Plantinga’s attempt at deactivating the Problem of Evil (apart from the one mentioned in footnote 13) consisted in arguing that if we have certain knowledge of both the existence of God and the existence of Evil, the compatibility of those two phenomena need not be proven, for their mere coincidental existence is already a testimony to their compatibility.

Van Inwagen’s strategy consists in “stories”, or defenses, which explain the coexistence of both Evil and God in a way that is not surprising on the theistic hypotheses. In other words, Inwagen’s defense consists in a story which we have no reason to believe is false, which is true for all we know, and which presents a kind of God that is compatible with the evils we see. Since we have no reason to believe his story to be less probable than a God inconsistent with the “patterns of suffering” present in our world, then the problem of Evil loses some of its appeal.

¹⁵ Dustin Crummett, “The Real Advantages of The Simulation Solution to The Problem of Natural Evil,” *Religious studies* 57 (2021): 627, doi:10.1017/S0034412519000726.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ Barry Dainton, “Natural Evil: The Simulation Solution,” *Religious studies* 56, no. 2 (2018): 1–22.

¹⁸ Crummett, “The Real Advantages,” 623.

2.2 A way to relate the problem of Evil to the simulation hypothesis.

Dainton, Crummett and Johnson¹⁹ have recently argued for what they call the “simulation solution”. They argue that from a theistic perspective, the simulation hypothesis might be an answer to the Problem of Evil.²⁰ Indeed, if we live in a world designed by simulators who have free will, then the so-called “natural evils” of our world are, in fact, the “moral evils” of our simulators. From then on, a free-will theodicy could explain why they can inflict such suffering on us, the simulated beings, and the idea of an omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent God is safe from the criticism of the Problem of Evil. This might be, as Johnson puts it, “an unpalatable position”²¹ for theists, but if there are evils in our world, and God cannot create worlds with evils, then it seems reasonable to think that God did not create our world, thus hinting at non-divine creators. This solution is characterized by Crummett as a *subsumption theodicy*: “[it] attempts to subsume apparently natural evils under the category of moral evils by showing that apparently natural evils are in fact the result of creaturely wrongdoing.”²²

This is the main way in which the simulation hypothesis and the Problem of Evil have crossed paths: the simulation hypothesis offers a solution to the Problem of Evil. I believe there is a second, more fruitful way of linking the simulation hypothesis and the Problem of Evil.

¹⁹ David Kyle Johnson, “Natural Evil and the Simulation Hypothesis,” *Philo* 14, no. 2 (2011): 161–75. The relevant papers for Dainton and Crummett have already been referenced in footnotes 14 and 16.

²⁰ Bostrom, “Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?,” *Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 53, No. 211, (2003): 243–55 (First version: 2001), also argues that if we do live in a simulation, the problem of Evil stops being problematic. The fact that we live in a simulation could offer us the following solution: all our memories of pain and suffering are illusions our simulators have implanted in our minds. What Bostrom suggests is that if the simulation hypothesis is true, it opens up the door to a new solution to the problem of evil: “evils (...) just don’t really exist, and they could in fact be illusory memories the simulators have implanted in our minds”. As he concedes himself, this only holds if you are not suffering at the present moment. This idea has not been discussed further in the literature, perhaps because it is indeed difficult to defend: first, painful feelings can be summoned almost at will by reflecting on past painful experiences, thus making the suffering present and not merely a memory, thus establishing the existence of suffering in our world beyond the mere illusion of suffering, and second, it is hard to see why our simulators would give us these illusory memories of pain.

²¹ Johnson, “Natural Evil,” 162.

²² Crummett, “The Real Advantages,” 620.

2.3 How the problem of evil and the simulation hypothesis should interact

Dainton, Crummett and Johnson might be taking the problem backwards. The Problem of Evil turns on a self-evident observation, that there is suffering in the world, whereas the simulation hypothesis isn't as certain as the existence of evil. Because we have more reason to believe that "evil exists" than we have to believe that "we are in a simulation", we would have to grant more credence to our belief in the existence of evil than in our belief of the simulation hypothesis (because we have good empirical reasons to believe there are evils in our world, and comparatively less evidence to believe we live in a simulation). Therefore, if we are to study the interaction between those two ideas, we ought to consider the existence of pointless suffering to be true and to evaluate the simulation hypothesis in light of this. This does not mean that Dainton, Crummett and Johnson are *wrong*, but that they have only explored one side of the coin. They have examined what happens to the Problem of Evil when we take the simulation hypothesis seriously. I will now explore what happens to the simulation hypothesis when we take the Problem of Evil seriously.

In the case of the Problem of Evil as addressed to God, it resulted from this critique that God either did not exist, or that he could not have the characteristics we traditionally attributed to him. I believe it is not necessary for the Problem of Evil to be addressed to a deity. It only ought to be addressed to a world-making figure. If the world they created contains pointless suffering, then they can be held accountable for the creation of such suffering. Furthermore, if the fact that the world they created contains suffering contradicts with some characteristics we can reasonably expect them to have, then we can conclude they do not exist, or that the likelihood of their existence is reduced. If the Problem of Evil can thus be addressed to any world maker, we can address it to the simulators postulated by the simulation hypothesis.

2.4 The Problem of Evil as addressed to the simulation hypothesis.

If we assume we live in a simulation, it seems reasonable to believe the simulators have both vast power over the simulation (near omnipotency), and vast knowledge over it (near omniscience). Adherents of the simulation hypothesis say so themselves!

As Chalmers points out, simulations tend to give the simulator tremendous flexibility and power as to how to structure the simulation and intervene in it. If a simulator has built a simulation from its foundations, developing the entire software running the simulation, then by tampering with its own creation, the simulator can do pretty much anything and everything in the simulation.

As he also points out, simulators will most likely know pretty much everything that is happening inside the simulation. A complete monitoring is possible. What could possibly be the purpose of an inscrutable simulation? No matter what the goal of a simulation is, this goal, whether it be research, entertainment, or decision-making, is much harder to accomplish if the simulation is unreadable (if it is impossible for the simulator to know what is happening inside the simulation). If unreadableness defeats the purpose of any simulation, it's safe to assume a high degree of readability for any simulation.

We can therefore assume that simulators, were they to exist, would have, to a high degree, control and knowledge of their simulation of our universe.²³ The central question of the Problem of Evil naturally follows: given the fact that the simulators are omnipotent and omniscient in regard to their simulation, why are there evils in our world? If they know of these evils and are able to prevent them, why don't they do so?

If two out of the three "omni" characteristics traditionally attributed to God are met (at least to some extent) by the simulators, the evils of our world could only be explained by the lack of the third characteristic: goodness. Therefore, if we live in a simulation, we have to assume the simulators are not good enough to prevent the natural evils of our world. It would not be a stretch, in this case, to call them cruel, and would provide us a simple and straightforward explanation of the Problem of Evil as addressed to the simulation hypothesis: if the simulators know of the evils of our world and are able to stop them, why don't they do so? Because they are not all-good. Or, put simply, they just don't care enough about our suffering to prevent it.

But is that plausible? I will argue it is unlikely they are malevolent. I will argue that, were they to exist, we would have good reason to think

²³ Ultimately, the exact degree of power and knowledge the simulators would have over the simulation is impossible to know precisely. One could claim that I overestimate it, though I believe that it is safe to assume knowledge large enough to know that simulated consciousnesses suffer, and power large enough to prevent this suffering.

they would be benevolent beings, who would, therefore, not fill their simulation with suffering. If that is indeed the case, and they are therefore benevolent, near-omnipotent, and near-omniscient, given the fact that our world is filled with suffering, we can conclude they are most likely not the creators of our world, or in other words, that we do not live in a simulation. My final task is thus to argue for the fact that were they to exist, they would, in addition to being omniscient and omnipotent (about the simulation), also be benevolent beings. I will argue for this using the idea of the expansion of the moral circle.

Before I move on to the third section, allow me a short methodological note. My argument is probabilistic in nature. I contend that given the existence of evil in our world, we either have to accept that our simulators are cruel, or we have to accept that we do not live in a simulation. I think it is not probable they are this cruel, and this, therefore, lowers the probability of the simulation hypothesis being true. At this point, adherents of the simulation hypothesis would have to explain why simulators are this cruel and why they allow evils to exist. If they want to claim we might be in a simulation, they have to give an explanation for the existence of evils and the cruelty of the simulators. But first, a principle of charity would have us restrain from believing simulators would be this cruel, without having good reason for believing so. The burden of proof is on adherents of the simulation hypothesis. However, not only do we not have any reason to believe simulators would be this cruel, I contend there are good reasons to believe they would not be cruel, but instead, quite moral beings.

3. The Expansion of the Moral Circle

I argue it is unlikely simulators would be malevolent beings because they would most likely have a wide and expansive moral circle, meaning they would treat conscious and sentient beings like us benevolently.

Much of my argument rests on this idea. To formulate it in other words, the benevolence of potential simulators towards simulated beings can be inferred from the expansion of the moral circle: as time goes by, a given group will consider more and more kinds of beings to be moral subjects.

I will first give a brief historical overview of this idea, from its birth to its modern version. I will then explain why we can assume our simulators would most likely have undergone an expansion of their moral circle and

would consider us to be beings worthy of moral consideration. This case will be approached through the tools of evolutionary ethics. I will finally provide a “proof of concept” and show that such an expansion has indeed taken place in our world. In a formalized way, my general argument for this section goes like this:

Premise 1: Simulations can only be made by civilizations that are collaborative and cooperative.

Premise 2: These kinds of civilization will, therefore, be benevolent and most likely have undergone an expansion of their moral circle, likely to the point of including simulated but conscious and sentient beings in their moral circle.

Premise 3: Civilizations of benevolent simulators will most likely not inflict widespread suffering on simulated beings.

Conclusion: Since there is widespread suffering in our world, something simulators would most probably not allow, chances are we do not live in a simulation.

The first premise seems a given. The second premise is the crucial one, and I will defend it at length in section 3.2.

3.1 Brief historical overview of the idea

The idea of there being an expansion of the moral circle has a long history. In the 2nd century, Stoic philosopher Hierocles already characterized our concern and duty for others as a series of concentric circles: at the center of these circles, standing as our most important object of concern and whom we have the strongest duty towards, is ourselves. As the circles gradually become wider and move away from the center, objects of lesser concern and lesser moral obligations are included. In closer circles, there are kins. Then comes extended family, our local community, other cities, our country, and so on, all the way to the entire human race.

Closer to us and more relevant to our current study, the 19th-century Irish philosopher W. E. H. Lecky wrote in his “History of European morals” that,

The question of morals must always be a question of proportion or of degree. At one time the benevolent affections embrace merely the family, soon the circle expanding includes first a class, then a nation, then a coalition of nations, then all humanity, and finally, its influence is felt in the dealings of man with the animal world. In each of these

stages a standard is formed, different from that of the preceding stage, but in each case the same tendency is recognized as virtue.²⁴

Lecky here mentions that this circle is not fixed but can actually expand to gradually encompass more and more beings. This idea was studied in greater depth by Peter Singer in his 1981 “The Expanding Circle”. In this work, Singer studies the impacts of sociobiology on ethics and contends that even though it is true we have natural altruistic tendencies towards our biological kin, this isn’t enough to justify a takeover of ethics by biology. Contrary to what E. O. Wilson thought, evolutionary biology alone does not exhaust the domain of ethics, which remains firmly in the hands of philosophers. In order to extend this circle of concern, Singer contends, we must rely on ethical thinking. Leaving aside the description of this phenomenon and instead claiming that this phenomenon should be harvested and put to use in order to ensure the welfare of more and more beings, he says that

The circle of altruism has broadened from the family and tribe to the nation and race, and we are beginning to recognize that our obligations extend to all human beings. The process should not stop there (...). The only justifiable stopping place for the expansion of altruism is the point at which all whose welfare can be affected by our actions are included within the circle of altruism. This means that all beings with the capacity to feel pleasure or pain should be included; we can improve their welfare by increasing their pleasures and diminishing their pains.²⁵

Forty years on, the expansion of the moral circle recently came back to the forefront of the philosophical scene thanks to the Effective Altruism (EA) movement, which considers that restricting our moral concern for persons alive today is a grave blind spot: future people should be accounted for and, given the fact there will be tremendously many of them, thinking about our impact on them should be a moral priority. Jacy Anthi and Eze Paez thus think the expansion of the moral circle should cover future people. They define the expansion of the moral circle as such: “a community’s moral circle has expanded with respect to some previous time *t* if, and only if, a number of entities which used to be given less than full

²⁴ William Lecky, *History of European Morals. From Augustus to Charlemagne* (New York, London: D. Appleton and Company, 1869), 107.

²⁵ Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 124.

moral consideration at t are now given more moral consideration.”²⁶ Of course, this expansion usually occurs in terms of sets and not individuals. Groups are included in the moral circle.

Now, for my argument to take off, I need to establish that our simulators (were they to exist) would have undergone such an expansion, meaning they would most likely be benevolent and moral beings.

3.2 The moral circle of our simulators: a case from evolutionary ethics

The case I wish to build here goes as follows: as cooperative species evolve, the moral consideration they bestow upon their cooperative partners expands with their circle of cooperation.

More specifically, I argue that as a species becomes a cooperative and social one, its members must develop altruistic behaviour to help facilitate this cooperation.

Any cooperative species must necessarily develop altruistic behaviour towards their cooperation partners to ensure that cooperation runs smoothly. Cooperation among a group of malevolent beings would be impossible. In order to prevent cooperation from breaking down, collaborative species necessarily had to develop, throughout their evolutionary history, altruistic behaviour. Such altruistic behaviours can be extremely varied and need not be the same for every species, but it intuitively seems that they must be present in one form or another. In the case of humans, Joshua Greene contends that “built in our moral brains are automated psychological programs that enable and facilitate cooperation”.²⁷ Such psychological programs include concern for others, direct reciprocity, commitment to threats and promises, reputation, assortment, and indirect reciprocity. Indeed, we seem to have a natural aversion to harming one another, and a natural tendency to help one another (concern for others). We cooperate when we know we can reap the benefits of cooperation (direct reciprocity), we punish uncooperative partners (commitment to threats and promises), we value reputation a great deal when choosing cooperative partners (reputation), readily cooperate with members of our group (assortment), and trust that uncooperative partners will be punished by others too (indirect reciprocity). As Greene explains, “All

²⁶ Jacy Anthis and Eze Paez, “Moral circle expansion: A promising strategy to impact the far future,” *Futures* 130 (2021): 2.

²⁷ Joshua Greene, *Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them* (London: Atlantic Books, 2015), 62–3.

of this psychological machinery is perfectly designed to promote cooperation among otherwise selfish individuals”.²⁸

Therefore, it seems that, as Green explains,

Each of us occupies the center of a set of concentric social circles. Immediately surrounding us are our closest relatives and friends, bounded by a larger circle of more distant relatives and acquaintances. Beyond our circles of kith and kin are strangers to whom we are related through our memberships in groups of various kinds and sizes: village, clan, tribe, ethnic group; neighborhood, city, state, region, country; church, denomination, religion.²⁹

Therefore, any cooperative species tends to act benevolently towards their cooperative partners, and as a species becomes more and more collaborative, this tendency is extended to ever more distant fellows, to the point of encompassing non-collaborative partners. This tendency is again, empirically confirmed in highly collaborative species, and Michael Tomasello gives us a possible principled reason for this, which he calls the “Interdependence Hypothesis”. As cooperative groups grow in size, they eventually split into smaller size groups “still unified at the tribal level”.³⁰ When this split occurs, the tendency to treat benevolently in-group members is extended to new out-group members.

However, one wishes to precisely formulate this idea, it seems that treating benevolently collaborative partners is a necessity, and also a tendency which we can reasonably expect to be extended to, at some point, non-collaborative partners. Therefore, since we can assume our simulators would necessarily be a collaborative and cooperative group, we can expect them to be benevolent, moral beings, who have a wide and expansive moral circle.

3.3 Proof of concept from our world

One could be tempted to reject the idea presented in the previous subsection on the grounds that in our world, we can see that this process has never taken place: our world is violent, ripped apart by wars, and altruism does not seem to be the hallmark of humanity, supposedly a collaborative species. This would be a misguided criticism, since the case we have built

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 62.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 49.

³⁰ Michael Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Morality* (Harvard University Press, 2016), 5.

in the previous subsection seems to be empirically confirmed if we retrace the expansion of the moral circle of the human species. It is a historical fact that our moral circle expands. In the last 300 years or so,

groups that were previously denied equivalent moral standing—including propertyless men, women, ethnic and religious minorities, homosexuals, and slaves—have become moral equals deserving of similar legal treatment. Slavery and the slave trade were abolished; democracy spread; women throughout the world have been granted the right to vote; and workers enjoyed an ever-expanding set of social and economic protections.³¹

The moral circle can be understood as a metaphorical boundary that separates who or what is considered morally relevant and who or what is not. Historically, many societies have started with a narrow moral circle that only includes members of their own tribe, community, or nation. As societies evolve and progress, the moral circle tends to expand to include a broader range of entities. The 19th century witnessed the emergence of animal welfare movements advocating for the humane treatment of animals. In the mid-20th century, amidst civil rights and feminist movements, the moral circle expanded further. African-Americans, women, and other marginalized groups began to be acknowledged as full-fledged citizens worthy of moral consideration. The latter half of the 20th century and the early 21st century brought a growing recognition of environmental ethics. As ecological awareness spread, ecosystems, plants, and non-human species were integrated into the moral circle.

Michael Huemer, building on the very extensive work done by Steven Pinker in his 2011 book “The Better Angels of Our Nature”, shows that the decrease in war and murder, the decrease of torture and capital execution, the eradication of slavery, the decrease in racism and sexism, and the processes of decolonization and democratization, all show that societies tend to give more and more people rights (and thus moral consideration). In most Western countries, even non-human beings are making moral gains: animals already have some rights, and the rights of non-sentient beings, such as robots or potential artificial intelligences are already being discussed with seriousness. Chalmers goes all the way to defend the moral worth of simulated beings:

³¹ Manvir Singh and Moshe Hoffman, “Individualistic moral principles and the expansion of the moral circle,” *Ethics and Psychology* (2022): 1. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/pqem7>.

If consciousness is all that matters for moral status [he thinks it is the case], simulated humans have the same moral status as ordinary humans,³² (...) Is it ok to create a simulation involving a million conscious beings all experiencing agony for their whole existence? I'd say it clearly is not.³³

It is useful here to back my claim about the expansion of the moral circle with some data. Some measures have been devised to precisely measure the scale at which individuals or societies grant moral status to other beings, like the "Moral Expansiveness Scale", but I think it is here more warranted to use different proxies to measure to size of our moral circle through time.

Among the candidates for good proxies, we can think of rights, war and violence, political systems and political empowerment. I take these proxies to be self-explanatory. If we consider a certain kind of being to be a moral subject, we are more likely to grant them rights, less likely to treat them violently, and more likely to grant them political freedom and power. Therefore, if there indeed has been an expansion of the moral circle, we should expect to see, throughout history, an increase in rights and political freedom and a decline in war and violence. It turns out this is indeed the case. Here are but a few telling examples.

Violence, both through warfare and outside of it, has drastically declined during human history.³⁴

³² Chalmers, *Reality*, 345.

³³ *Ibidem*, 346.

³⁴ Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature. Why Violence has Declined* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012) and Bill Gates, "Better Angels of Our Nature in Graphs and Numbers," *GatesNotes*, Sept 2, 2012, <https://www.gatesnotes.com/about-bill-gates/better-angels-of-our-nature-in-graphs-and-numbers>, accessed December 05, 2022.

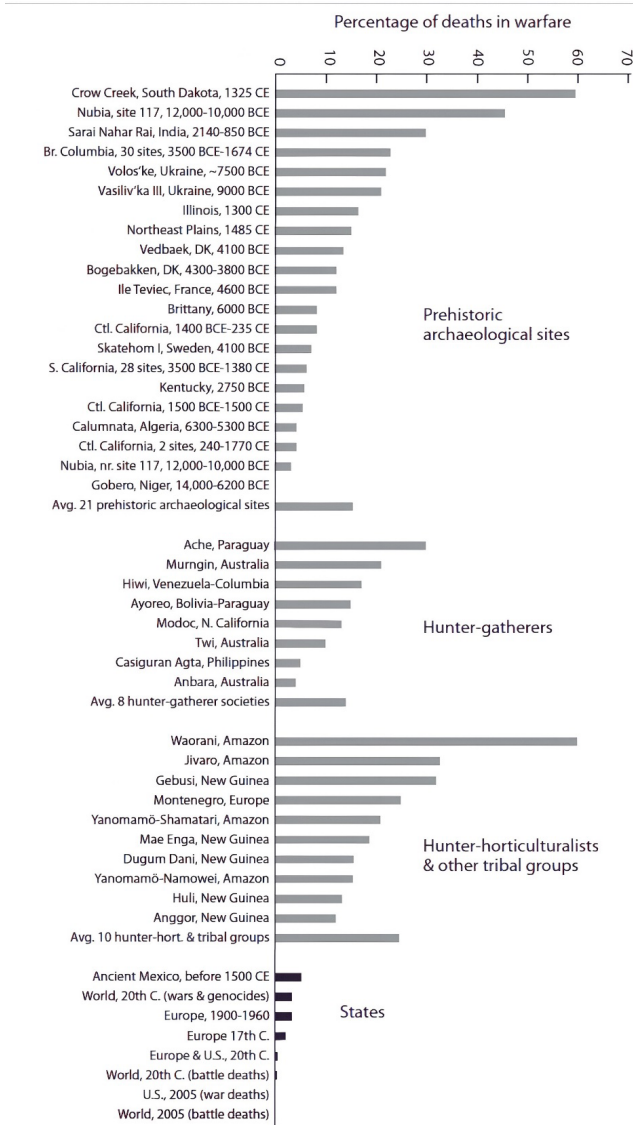


Figure 1. As we can see from this graphic, the percentage of deaths through warfare has significantly declined through history, indicating that violence, at least in the form of violent war, has also significantly declined.³⁵

³⁵ Michael Shermer, "The Enemy Within: A Review of «The Violence Paradox»" *Skeptic*, November 19, 2019, https://www.skeptic.com/reading_room/enemy-within-review-of-the-violence-paradox-nova-pbs/, accessed May 10, 2024.

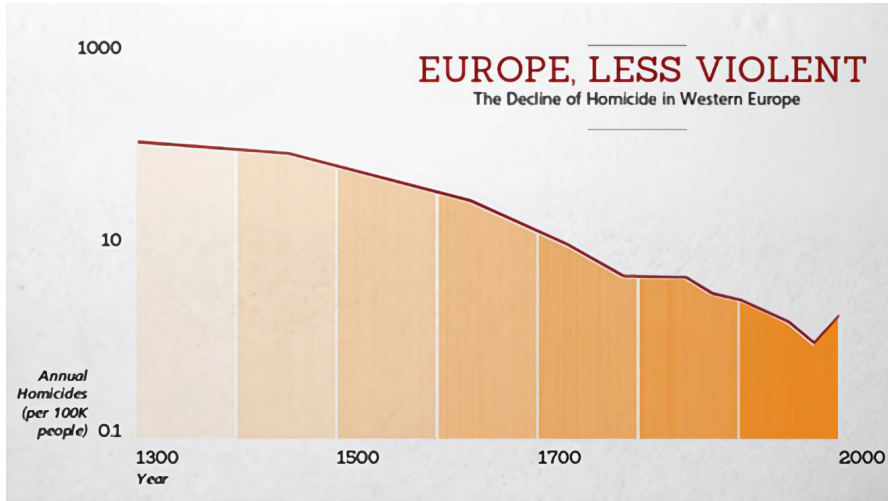


Figure 2. As we can see from this graphic, the number of homicide (per capita) has significantly declined, indicating, like the first graphic, that violence, at least in the form of homicide, has significantly decreased over time.³⁶

Data about the time of the abolition of torture³⁷ also shows a profound change in mentality. The abolition of torture also participates in the moral circle expansion: it is gradually more and more recognized that people have inalienable rights to bodily integrity, and notwithstanding the fact that torture is still sometimes used in warfare, its official abolition widely restricted its use.

³⁶ Bill Gates, "Better Angels of Our Nature in Graphs and Numbers," *GatesNotes*, Sept 2, 2012, <https://www.gatesnotes.com/about-bill-gates/better-angels-of-our-nature-in-graphs-and-numbers>, accessed December 05, 2022.

³⁷ Steven Pinker, "A History of Violence: Edge Master Class 2011," *Edge*, Sept 27, 2011, https://www.edge.org/conversation/steven_pinker-a-history-of-violence-edge-master-class-2011, accessed December 05, 2022.

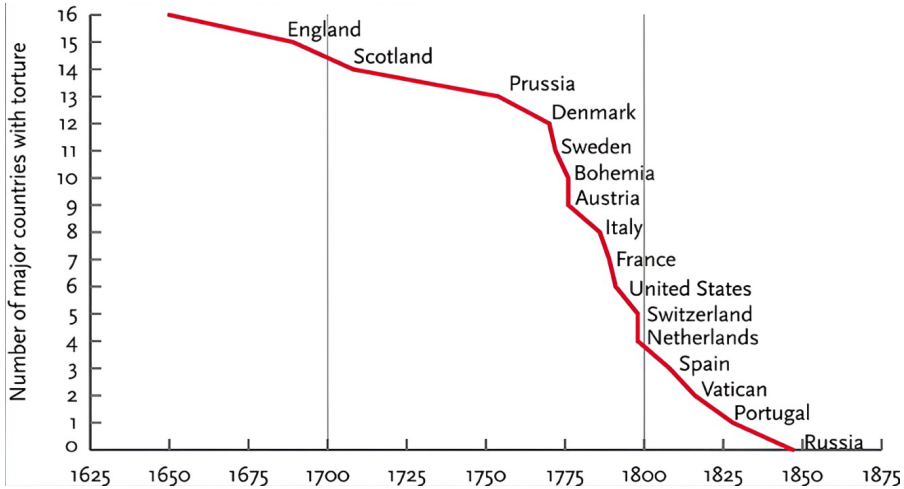


Figure 3. As we can see from this graphic, throughout history, more and more countries have abolished the use of torture, indicating the expanding recognition that torture violates the moral standing of beings who ought to be granted such moral standing.³⁸

The same goes for the abolition of slavery,³⁹ the recognition of women's rights,⁴⁰ and the gradual democratization⁴¹ of political systems around the world. All of these processes can be seen worldwide and have been constant throughout history.

³⁸ Steven Pinker, "A History of Violence: Edge Master Class 2011," *Edge*, Sept 27, 2011, https://www.edge.org/conversation/steven_pinker-a-history-of-violence-edge-master-class-2011, accessed December 05, 2022.

³⁹ Michael Huemer, "A Liberal Realist Answer to Debunking Skeptics: The Empirical Case for Realism," *Philosophical Studies* 173, no.7 (2016): 8.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 8.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 9.

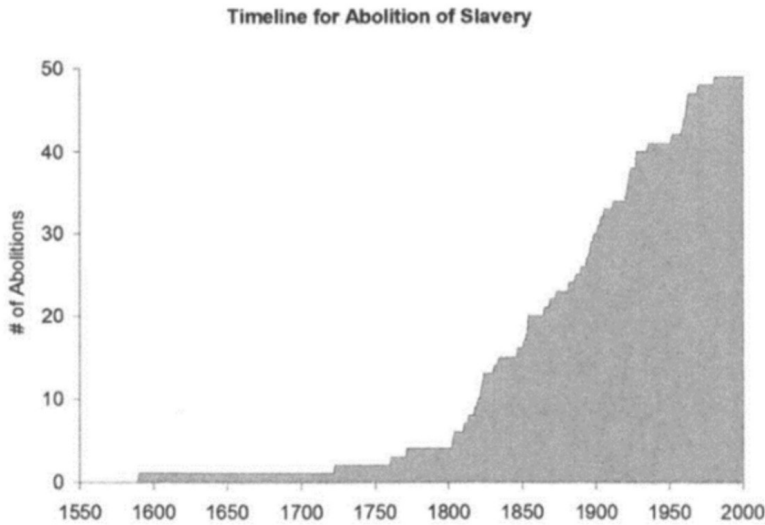


Figure 4. As we can see from this graphic, slavery has been, throughout history, abolished by more and more countries, indicating the expanding recognition that slavery violates the moral standing of beings who ought to be granted such moral standing.⁴²

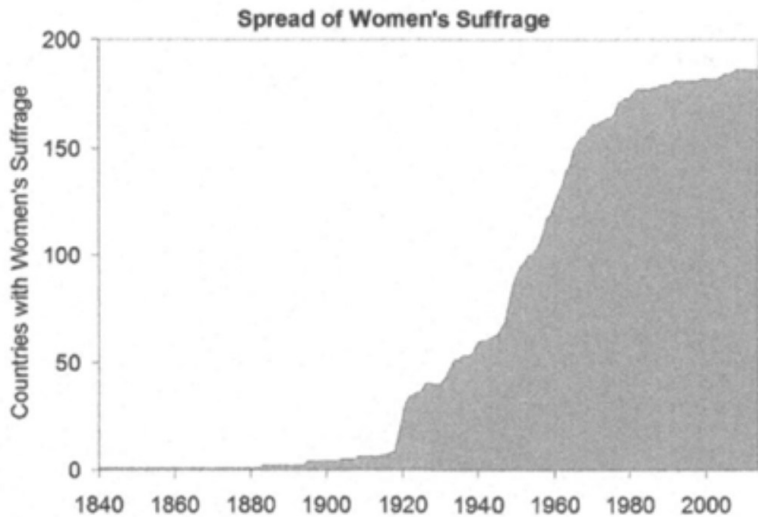


Figure 5. As we can see from this graphic, women's suffrage has been, throughout history, granted by more and more countries, indicating the expanding recognition that

⁴² Michael Huemer, "A Liberal Realist Answer to Debunking Skeptics: The Empirical Case for Realism," *Philosophical Studies* 173, no.7 (2016): 8.

women's suffrage participates to grant women political autonomy and full-fledged moral standing.⁴³

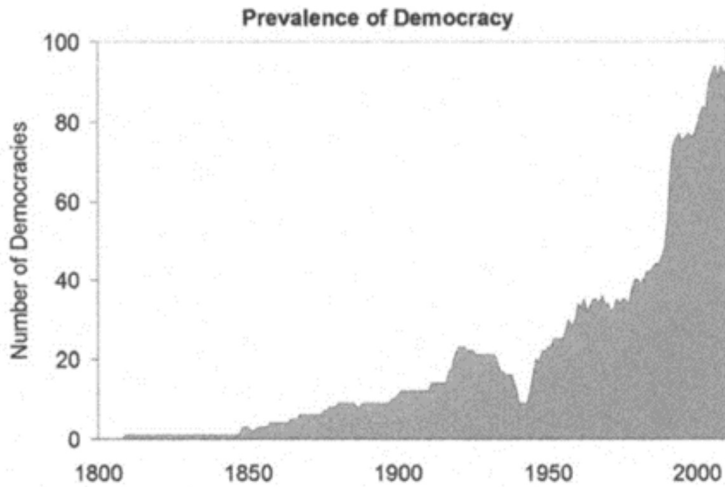


Figure 6. As we can see from this graphic, democracy has been, throughout history, adopted by more and more countries, indicating the expanding recognition that democracy participates to grant citizens political autonomy and full-fledged moral standing.⁴⁴

Finally, the expansion of the moral circle can be verified through a very telling proxy: the concern for minority rights.⁴⁵ It might be the best proxy because the legal gain minorities have obtained are proof that they, who prior to their moral recognition were not considered full-fledged moral subjects, have achieved this status and that there is an expansion of the number of beings who are considered moral subjects.

⁴³ Michael Huemer, "A Liberal Realist Answer to Debunking Skeptics: The Empirical Case for Realism," *Philosophical Studies* 173, no.7 (2016): 8.

⁴⁴ Michael Huemer, "A Liberal Realist Answer to Debunking Skeptics: The Empirical Case for Realism," *Philosophical Studies* 173, no.7 (2016): 8.

⁴⁵ Gates, "Better Angels," 8.

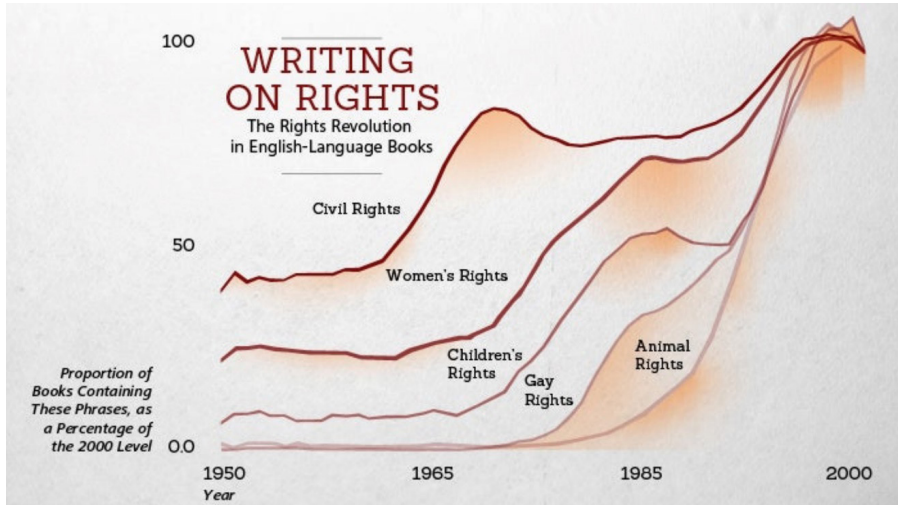


Figure 7. As we can see from this graphic, writing on rights has been, throughout history, more and more prominent, indicating the expanding concern given to rights and, correlatively, to moral standing.⁴⁶

Apart from those examples, we can also see that, throughout history, the human rights index has climbed up, there are more and more independent national human rights institutions; individual liberties and equality before the law have increased, private civil liberties have increased, the physical integrity index has increased, democracies are more common, women's suffrage has increased, women's political empowerment has increased, universal suffrage has increased, equal access to power for all groups has increased and the share of adult citizens who have the right to vote has increased.⁴⁷

What I take myself to have established here is that the expansion of the moral circle is indeed possible, and this lends credence to our claim of section 3.2 that any collaborative species must be, in some sense, benevolent. Of course, setbacks can happen. My claim is not that such setbacks are impossible and that any cooperative species are moral saints. My only claim is that, in broad terms, more and more groups of living beings, whether humans or not, are, through time, granted moral

⁴⁶ Bill Gates, "Better Angels of Our Nature in Graphs and Numbers," GatesNotes, Sept 2, 2012, <https://www.gatesnotes.com/about-bill-gates/better-angels-of-our-nature-in-graphs-and-numbers>, accessed December 05, 2022.

⁴⁷ These can all be confirmed thanks to the website "Our World in Data," <https://ourworldindata.org/>.

consideration by cooperative groups. If this is at least plausible, then it is at least plausible that civilizations more technologically advanced than ourselves, which have had a lot of time to expand their moral circle, will also grant moral status to a wide variety of beings.

3.3 The benevolence of our simulators

As there indeed is, as time goes by, an expansion of the moral circle, and as it is safe to assume any cooperative species must have benevolent tendencies, it is also safe to assume that simulators (who, in order to get to the technological stage required to run simulations have had a long history of cooperation) are likely moral and benevolent beings. This means their moral circle could be just as large as ours, or even larger.⁴⁸ As this process seems widespread among all civilizations, it is safe to assume that every intelligent civilization that evolves over a long period of time would also develop a wide moral circle.

In every case, we clearly see that as time goes by, earthly civilizations move towards pacifism and the protection of the rights of more and more living beings. We can thus conclude that if this trend is exportable to any possible collaborative civilization (and we have good reason to think it is, thanks to our case from evolutionary ethics), a civilization that would reach the stage of running large-scale simulations would not inflict needless suffering on the inhabitants of their simulations. Therefore, we can say that whereas we have no reason to believe simulators would be cruel and would inflict unnecessary evil on simulated beings, we have comparatively good reason to believe they would not. From this, it follows that we should give more credence to their benevolence than to their cruelty. If they are not cruel but benevolent, they would not allow for useless evil, and as there are useless evils in our world, it seems to hint at the fact that our world is not, in fact, a simulation.

To summarize, my argument goes as follows. I assume a civilization capable of running universe-scale simulations must be collaborative and cooperative. If they are cooperative, then we have good reasons to believe they are benevolent, moral beings. If this is true, the fact that we live in a

⁴⁸ This might seem like a strange idea to us, but if we went back in time a couple hundred years ago and told people that women, racial minorities, and sexual minorities had the same rights as today's heterosexual white male, they would be quite surprised. If they learned animals and potential future artificial intelligence might soon gain rights, they would be quite simply baffled.

simulation is highly unlikely, given the painful and pointless natural evils of our world. If we formulate the same argument in terms more closely resembling the Problem of Evil, we can say that simulators are local gods who are near omnipotent and near omniscient, and who are likely to be mostly good (or at least, it is more likely they are good than it is likely they are cruel). Given the fact that natural evils exist in our world, it is more likely our world was not created by these beings. Therefore, the possibility that our world is a simulation is significantly reduced.

Is it possible we are living in a simulation? There will always be a possibility, even extremely small, that we do. Is it possible our simulators are downright cruel and enjoying our suffering? There will always be a possibility. Is it possible our simulators have just put the simulation in fast-forward, gone on a coffee break or were bored from monitoring it, and haven't checked the simulation yet to stop it if it went awry? There will always be a possibility. My only point here is that the Problem of Evil greatly diminishes the chances of the simulation hypothesis being true, and the only question that has to be asked is what is more probable: that we live in a simulation run by cruel people, or that we simply do not live in a simulation? There are more reasons to believe we are not in a simulation than there are to believe we live in a simulation run by cruel people, and therefore, it is more warranted to hold the non-simulation scenario for the true one. My argument is thus only probabilistic and aims at diminishing the likelihood of the simulation hypothesis being true.

4. Counterarguments

Even if my claim is only probabilistic, it is still subject to counterarguments.

First, the simulators might not have the power over their simulation I grant them. For example, they might just have set up the initial parameters of the simulation, and then let it run free. This would make sense, because what could be the use of a pre-determined simulation of which they know the outcome? From both an entertainment, research and decision-making point of view, an open-ended simulation would make more sense than a deterministic simulation. Therefore, they wouldn't have the power to intervene in the simulation. But I find this implausible on the grounds that even if simulations are open-ended, they can be equipped with automatic stops in the case of something going wrong. If they are indeed moral beings as I suggest they are, we can bet pretty confidently on the fact that there are, embedded in their simulation, stopping criteria:

if the amount of pain and suffering becomes unbearable, then for ethical purposes, the simulation could be stopped. To this, of course, one could reply that we have no reason to think we have actually passed this stopping criterion.⁴⁹

Second, someone can grant that they are indeed a benevolent species, but we cannot exclude the fact that our simulation might have been created by a single malevolent person acting on their own. Our world might be a simulation run by a single deviant person who does not care for our suffering. But this is unlikely given the resources problem: it is unlikely a single person, acting on their own, has the capacity and resources to simulate our whole universe. I take it that simulating the entirety of our universe is likely to be a large-scale project necessitating the efforts and resources of many actors, and that a single person would probably not have the resources to, alone, simulate an entire universe.

Third, someone could contend that, maybe, they *have* to make us suffer. Say that, in their world, our simulation yields great utility, that the knowledge acquired from the simulation produces a tremendous amount of well-being in their world (for example, they might have learned how to prevent a pandemic). Then, from a utilitarian perspective (which they might hold to be the true moral view), the utility of both worlds (our simulated world and their non-simulated world) combined would outweigh the suffering of our world. In other words, we might be myopic about the amount of well-being in the whole universe. We see only the well-being and ill-being of our world, but maybe the ill-being in our world could be justified by the great amount of well-being it produces in their world. Therefore, they could consider themselves allowed to make us suffer.

I do not have a definitive answer to this counter-argument, but I have two possible replies. First, if the amount of well-being in their world truly compensates for the amount of ill-being in ours, it seems other routes could have been taken to spare us from this suffering. They could have designed the simulation in such a way that the beings that inhabit it, us, wouldn't be sentient, and therefore wouldn't suffer. Second, and this is my simplest, yet, I believe, most effective response: what's more probable? The fact that we live in a simulation where the ill-being of our world is justified by a moral species of simulators who live in a world where their

⁴⁹ I thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this to my attention.

well-being rests on the simulation of our universe to a point where they are willing to accept to make us suffer in order to be better off, or... that we just don't live in a simulation? As I said, my argument is probabilistic. There are two options in front of us, and we have to choose. One option is that we live in a simulation run by people who make us suffer (for a reason we don't really know). The other option is that we just don't live in a simulation. The latter option seems much more probable.

This answer also holds for all the counterarguments presented here. What I have done throughout this paper is to show that if someone wishes to hold on to the simulation hypothesis, they have to introduce qualifications to their hypothesis, which reduces its likelihood. What I mean by this is the following: yes, our world might be a simulation, but given the fact that we can assume the simulators would be, generally speaking, omniscient, omnipotent, and good, if we want to defend the idea that we live in a simulation, we have to say our simulation was actually created by a single malevolent person, or that our simulation was actually created with the purpose of serving the greater good in their universe. These are all plausible scenarios, but the details included in the hypothesis lower its probability of being true. Therefore, what I have done is to show that in order to hold on to the simulation hypothesis (which one could do), they would need to come up with unlikely scenarios to explain the existence of evil in our world. For example, one could say that the simulation is in "fast-forward": a thousand years in our world is a single second in our simulators' world, and they just haven't had the time yet to shut it off.⁵⁰ Or, the simulation is some form of downloadable game in which anyone can create a world as they please. Again, this is possible, but it is a detail which further reduces the likelihood of the simulation hypothesis being true. In a sense, I am ready to grant most of the counterarguments have bite, but all of them, even if successful, also reduce the likelihood of the initial hypothesis being true.

5. Conclusion

As we see from my last response, the whole discussion around the simulation hypothesis has to be expressed in probabilistic terms, for it is a hypothesis which, notwithstanding what some scientists not too well versed in philosophy think, is untestable. Therefore, if we have to talk in

⁵⁰ I thank an anonymous reviewer for this comment.

probabilistic terms, we can pit scenarios against one another and simply ask: which is more likely?

The core of my argument ran along this exact line: I highlighted the fact that there is pointless suffering in our world, and from this, I inferred things about the simulators who would run such a simulation. What I ask is this: is this scenario, the one where there is an intelligent civilization that runs a simulation filled with pain and suffering and remains unfazed by it, more likely than the more commonsensical one where we just don't live in a simulation?

I have not, nor cannot say, exactly how much my claim reduces the likelihood of the simulation hypothesis being true, just like no proponent of the simulation hypothesis can precisely say how likely it is we live in a simulation. My argument reduces its likelihood, and that is all I can say about it, and all that I wish to establish. Just how significant this reduction of likelihood is, depends on the credence we lend to the initial simulation hypothesis, how much credence we lend to the simulators' benevolence, how much evils are in our world, and many other factors. Since I take their benevolence to be a safe bet, our world to be significantly filled with suffering, and the additional qualifications one needs to add to the initial hypothesis in order to maintain it to be unlikely, I take my argument to represent a significant reduction in likelihood, although this reduction cannot be quantified.

I have shown that we are justified in believing that every intelligent civilization that reaches a highly technological stage and, therefore, has had a long history of cooperation and collaboration is likely to be a moral civilization that would not engage in such pointless torture of beings of their creation. The Problem of Evil, thus addressed to the simulation hypothesis, seems to have the same effect as its standard formulation addressed to God: because the hypothetical creator of our world could not possess the characteristics, we attribute to them (in the case of God, omnipotence, omniscience, and all-goodness, and in the case of the simulators, near omnipotence, near omniscience, and highly moral attitudes), we have to conclude they do not exist. Therefore, we most probably do not live in a simulation.

I would like to thank Keven Bisson for his help in developing an intuition we both had regarding the simulation hypothesis into the idea presented in the paper. I would also like to thank him and Chris Howard for their numerous comments on previous versions of this paper, an

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The Burden of Philosophy: Evil and the Human Condition

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This article attempts to identify certain shortcomings in analytic philosophy as practised today. First, it identifies a disconnect between the darker aspects of the human condition and philosophers' inability to engage with them. Second, it locates this inability in a certain logic of detachment, explored by Peter Strawson. Third, it points out problems with Strawson's analysis, which it then tries to overcome, using Constantin Noica's account of the Platonising attitude philosophers are perennially tempted by – one of several ways in which humans try to overcome their fallen condition. This is contrasted with Thomas Nagel's valuable but still deficient discussion of the "cosmic question". This brings us, finally, to a reconsideration of an older tradition in philosophy, which focused more explicitly on human fallenness. Petrarch's Secretum meum is used as an example to show that while the failure of analytic philosophers has deep existential roots, it is not commendable. Philosophers must learn, again, to reflect on the darkness of the human soul – their own darkness.

Keywords: *Analytic Philosophy, Human Condition, Fallenness, Evil, Logic/Epistemology of Detachment, Platonising Attitude, Cosmic Question, Peter Strawson, Thomas Nagel, Constantin Noica, Petrarch*

Introduction

A philosophically interested alien, capable of moral sentiments, might have a bewildering experience, if he visited our planet today. He would see that human affairs are far from perfect. The planet as a whole is threatened by human induced global warming. Wars still devastate many countries, and the threat of nuclear apocalypse has not abated, but is growing again. Societies, even in the free world, face major problems, are run by autocrats and corrupt elites, are internally divided or deteriorating, weakened by economic, political and structural crises. Corporations and institutions, including universities, are characterised by internal strife, and are often run by incompetent or unjust managers. Of course, life offers many pleasures, and in some parts of the world, especially in the West, societies are quite decent. But even here many humans feel, in their soul, sad and

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without hope, especially in their lonely hours – if they can bear their loneliness and don't try to escape it by means of some diversion or entertainment. Deep down any human being knows that, no matter what, his life is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”, and not just in the anarchical state of nature Hobbes had in mind.¹ And this is just the present. If the alien studies the history of the planet, say that of the last 100 years, the alien might be horrified. “There are periods in history – presumably most of them are –, whose representation vis-à-vis human meanness and coldness is bound to fail”.² The alien would be quite justified to conclude that he has arrived on a planet on which the general feeling is that of “the darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the reduction of human beings to a mass, the hatred and mistrust of everything creative and free”.³

Our alien will then be curious to see what philosophers have to say about the general state of mankind. To his surprise, a significant number of them, especially among those who belong to the leading philosophical current, analytic philosophy, do not have such pessimistic views at all. They can be divided into roughly three groups.

First, there are the zealots. These believe that things are looking pretty good and that mankind is actually awaiting paradise, to be reached through the marvels of technology, social engineering (including education) and the manipulation of our bodies and brains. Says one leading moral philosopher: “Since human history may be only just beginning, we can expect that future humans, or supra-humans, may achieve some great goods that we cannot now even imagine. In Nietzsche's words, there has never been such a new dawn and clear horizon, and such an open sea”.⁴ Knowing that mankind has just passed through a century of unspeakable atrocities, some of them committed by the most advanced civilisations, our alien may wonder whether the task at hand is to advance yet another fantasy about the open sea before us or, instead, to reflect about the

¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Pelican Books, 1985), 186.

² Max Horkheimer, *Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1992), 204.

³ Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 40.

⁴ Derek Parfit, *On What Matters: Volume Two* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 618.

disfigured skeletons lying at the bottom of the ocean on which we sail, a “dark ocean without a shore and lighthouses”.⁵

Second, there are the hermits. They have no particular views about the state of mankind. They philosophise about topics detached from this planet. They write articles with titles such as “I am not, nor have I ever been a turnip”, “To Be F Is To Be G” or “Finitistic and Frequentistic Approximation of Probability Measures with or without σ -Additivity”.⁶ They use as data for their theories apparently innocuous sample sentences such as “Have you stopped beating your wife?” and “There are lots of US troops in Iraq”.⁷ These philosophers already live in a paradise. It is a false paradise, the paradise conferred by the harmless beauty of quasi-mathematical formulas, which can be multiplied indefinitely. They can argue endlessly about the difference between “ $\Diamond \exists x Fx \rightarrow \exists x \Diamond Fx$ ” and “ $\exists x \Diamond Fx \rightarrow \Diamond \exists x Fx$ ”.⁸ If asked whether God exists or how the gas chambers were possible, some of them might stutter or say that they have no “intuitions” about these topics.⁹ They have insulated themselves from the rest of society, from the sorrows of the many and from the horrors of history. They may sit at our table, but have nothing to contribute to the conversation.¹⁰ The alien will notice that some of these philosophers even pride

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes* (1763), *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Königlich-Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, 1900–), Ak. 2:66.

⁶ Cf. Josh Parsons, “I am not now, nor have I ever been, a turnip,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83, no.1 (2005): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048400500043894>; Cian Dorr, “To Be F Is To Be G,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 30, no.1 (December 2016): 39–134, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpe.12079>; Gerhard Schurz and Hannes Leitgeb, “Finitistic and Frequentistic Approximation of Probability Measures with or without σ -Additivity,” *Studia Logica* 89, no. 2 (July 2008): 257–83, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11225-008-9128-3>.

⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983): §274; Herman Cappelen and John Hawthorne, *Relativism and Monadic Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

⁸ These are the so-called Barcan and Converse Barcan formulas, following Ruth C. Barcan, “A Functional Calculus of First Order Based on Strict Implication,” *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 11, no. 1 (March 1946): 1–16, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2269159>, 2, 7.

⁹ As I have witnessed myself on several occasions.

¹⁰ Witness Joyce Carol Oates’s description of Quine: “Quine’s family can’t read his work... so 90 percent of that person’s life is sort of unknown to them [...] Quine’s daughter said that about him, «Oh, he was the man who had dinner with us.»” Madison Darbyshire, “So much of life is accidental,” *Financial Times* (August 4, 2023), <https://www.ft.com/content/f8854bba-6c82-405f-8d7f-8d2d2dd9c20f9>, accessed August 5, 2023.

themselves on the fact that “inspiration, moral uplift, and spiritual comfort” have been excluded from what they count as philosophy.¹¹ Their posture consists in claiming that they don’t assume any moral posture, and that they are, as philosophers, not qualified for moral crusades.¹² But are moral *crusades* the only way in which philosophers can be involved in moral issues, as philosophers?

Finally, there are the hopeful believers. These are not entirely blind to mankind’s predicaments. They write books with titles such as *The Law of Peoples*, *The Morality of Freedom* and *Cultivating Humanity*, reflect on the relation between morality and legality, and between freedom and equality, attempt to develop, on paper, “in theory”, better economic and financial frameworks, and better systems of democratic representation.¹³ They believe that there are still new things to be discovered about the concepts of rights, duties and justice, things that *can, may, might* have important practical consequences. Some of them are more attuned to the complexities and inertness of our nature, while others are not, resembling at times the zealots or the hermits. But in essence, the hopeful believers are all humanist Aristotelians: they believe in the possibility of *human flourishing* and the perfectibility of man to that end. Their theories presuppose an “If only”: *if only* humans, politicians, societies, adopted their theories, if only they accepted Marx or Hayek, Earth would be a better place and man would be a happy animal. But that “If only” never materialises as they expect it, or if it does, it introduces new problems and conflicts. Certainly, they are right that some progress has been made and that some societies are better than others. Nevertheless, despite the unprecedented wealth and freedoms liberal democracies offer today, the term “human flourishing” remains as much a hyperbole as ever. A simple walk through any busy shopping mall might give us a different picture.

Man is not a happy animal. He does not truly know what he wants, since he is a paradoxical creature, a mystery to himself, “a bundle of

¹¹ Scott Soames, “Analytic Philosophy in America,” in *The Oxford Handbook of American Philosophy*, ed. Cheryl Misak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 453.

¹² Cappelen and Hawthorne, *Relativism*, 5.

¹³ Many years ago I had a philosopher colleague who described himself as a “quantitative social scientist” and claimed he had developed an *Excel spreadsheet* by means of which the current crisis of democracy can be solved. His reasoning was presumably of the form: “If only policy-makers adopted my spreadsheet..., then ...”. Some of our messianic phantasies have become more puerile, but maybe also less bloodthirsty.

uncertainty and error, glory and refuse of the universe”.¹⁴ He is characterised by “unsocial sociability” (“ungesellige Geselligkeit”) and his will is evil.¹⁵ The zealots, hermits and even the hopeful believers are detached from human reality, especially in the modern, secularised world, in which they seem to have settled themselves and in which they would like everybody else to settle themselves as well. Their misunderstanding of the (modern) human condition, which is also a self-misunderstanding, runs deep. They are heirs to the Enlightenment, an Enlightenment freed of its dark spots, an Enlightenment “light”.¹⁶ But “the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity.”¹⁷

The picture presented so far is no doubt gloomy and not fair to many academic philosophers. Still, the alien will be puzzled by the discrepancy between the sorry state of mankind and the fact that so many philosophers seem to belong to one of the groups described above. What explains the discrepancy? Why are those best qualified to engage in self-reflection so indifferent to “the human place in the cosmos”?¹⁸ The reason appears to be connected with the widespread idea that philosophy is a cognitive discipline that generates knowledge. This idea gives rise to an *epistemology of detachment*, which in turn explains, in part at least, the alienation of philosophers from humanity.¹⁹ To understand the logic of this detachment, I will now review arguments offered by some recent and some less recent thinkers.

¹⁴ Blaise Pascal, *Oeuvres complètes: Tome 1* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1998), 580.

¹⁵ Kant, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*. Gesammelte Schriften, Ak. 8:20.

¹⁶ For the dark spots of Enlightenment, see Giorgio Tonelli, “The «Weakness» of Reason in the Age of Enlightenment,” *Diderot Studies* 14 (2017): 217–44; Jerome Schneewind, *Essays on the History of Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Edward Kanterian, *Kant, God and Metaphysics: The Secret Thorn* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

¹⁷ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 1.

¹⁸ Max Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, trans. Manfred Frings (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009).

¹⁹ Contrast this with Cottingham’s epistemology of involvement, which he applies to the philosophy of religion. See John Cottingham, *Philosophy of Religion: Towards a More Humane Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 23.

Strawson on Naturalism

The epistemology of detachment comes in a variety of forms. One is implicit in scientistic naturalism, the idea that everything real can be described and explained by means of natural science. An important discussion of naturalism is found in Strawson's *Scepticism and Naturalism* (1985). The most general distinction he introduces is between a naturalism concerning the limits and ends of reason, and a naturalism concerning what there is, especially with respect to the mental and moral domain. The first kind of naturalism deals with the sceptical challenge. Its proponent was Hume (and to some extent Wittgenstein, in Strawson's view). Reason is unable to justify our beliefs about the external world, the viability of induction, etc. But despite this failure, we cannot help but believe in the body, form expectations based on induction, etc. Nature, Hume suggests, forces us, even the sceptic in us, to adopt such beliefs "by absolute and uncontrollable necessity".²⁰ Naturalism taken in the second sense has *prima facie* no connection with scepticism. Strawson subdivides this naturalism into strict and liberal (or harmless) naturalism.²¹ Strict naturalism is reductive, for example vis-à-vis moral attitudes. It claims that there is one, and one only, correct way to describe human beings. They are objects of nature and therefore everything about them can be explained with the terms we employ in explaining everything else in nature, by means of, say, Spinoza's monism, or by the hard sciences. Once we adopt this scientific point of view, we will realise, strict naturalism claims, that our usual forms of moral appraisal are illusory. Just as it does not make sense to blame an asteroid for slamming into a planet, it is equally pointless to blame Putin for bombing Ukrainian civilians. Strawson denies that the right response to reductive naturalism is to claim that there is a *sui generis* condition of freedom grounding the reality of our morality.²² Instead, we can appeal to Hume's naturalism: "We can no more be reasoned out of our proneness to personal and moral reactive attitudes in general than we can be reasoned out of our belief in the existence of the body." Those reactive attitudes are inescapable, "deeply rooted in our

²⁰ Quoted in Peter Strawson, *Scepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties* (New York: Routledge, 1985), 11.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 1, 31.

²² Strawson (*Ibidem*, 32) gives no details here, but he gives as examples Kant's account of noumenal freedom and a faculty of moral intuition some moral philosophers believe to exist.

natures as our existence as social beings”,²³ and therefore a fundamental condition of our humanity. This is the default, the “involved” position we find ourselves in as a matter of fact.

But Strawson also acknowledges that a second attitude is possible: the attitude of detachment. “It is possible for us sometimes to achieve a kind of detachment from the whole range of natural attitudes and reactions I have been speaking of and to view another person [...] in a purely objective light.”²⁴ We then see a human being as a nonpersonal object in nature. We look at others, and even ourselves, as lumps of matter, and the world becomes morally colourless.²⁵ This self-alienating stance of objectification does not necessarily amount to a philosophical position. It can be adopted for other reasons, e.g. for reasons of policy, curiosity or emotional self-defense.²⁶ In some circumstances this stance can have methodological advantages. Think of studies of the behaviour of crowds of people in confined spaces. Statistical modelling and comparisons with fish swarms are useful approaches in this area. “Fear of death” is strictly just a quantifiable parameter in such a model, one of several, and the model will deliver a good approximation of how the crowd will act if panic breaks out even if the individuals are reduced to mere dots on the screen. The sociologist or computer scientist working with such models does not have to believe that humans are actually reducible to such dots and corresponding sets of parameters. That is only the proposition of reductive naturalism, which makes a claim about what we really are, despite appearances.

This, then, is the difference between harmless/liberal and reductive detachment. Harmless detachment operates on the basis of an “as-if”: we look at others and ourselves as if we were mere lumps of matter. Harmless detachment is just one among several cognitive *modi operandi* of humans. The reductive naturalist, by contrast, does not just look at us, for specific purposes, *as* mere lumps of matter, but believes that this is what we really are. Such a belief is not a mere *modus operandi*. For this reason, the reductive naturalist is in conflict with the “involved” standpoint, which carries with it the conviction that there are moral values etc. Of course, the view that moral values don’t really exist in nature has been refuted by a number of philosophers, most recently e.g. by Ronald Dworkin, in

²³ *Ibidem*, 33.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 34.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 52.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 34.

Religion Without God (2013), and Fiona Ellis, in *God, Value, and Nature* (2014). Strawson, however, does not think that this conflict can be solved at a rational level. Both perspectives, the involved, non-reductive and the detached, reductive one are on a par. We cannot show, he claims, that either standpoint is the exclusively correct one, since that would require a third, neutral vantage point – and that does not exist.²⁷

This is problematic: if the conflict is between two contradictory, or at least contrary, propositions (“We are mere lumps of matter” – “We are fundamentally moral beings”), then we are left in a logical quandary. Following Strawson, it is not that one might be true, the other false, and we just cannot know which. Rather, he suggests, both can be asserted, with justification, and that is the end of the matter. However, if the fundamental conflict is not between propositions, but between standpoints or attitudes, the tension can be resolved, although not from Strawson’s position of neutrality.

The solution is actually implicit in Strawson’s own account. We need to realise that the relation between the involved and the detached attitude is not a relation between equal options. The default position is that of *being involved*. In his methodological detachment, the scientist remains in fact fully, practically involved.²⁸ The optional position is that of detachment. As Strawson points out, the detached attitude cannot be sustained for long without lapsing into a pathological state, a state which would amount to a “loss of all human involvement in personal relationships”.²⁹ If we now shift our attention to the logical level, this means that the reductionist belief is underwritten either by a temporary attitude of detachment or it hardens into something more permanent, a form of life. In the first case, the belief is just an idle wheel, a false philosophical claim.³⁰ In the second case it is pathological. In both cases the belief that we are mere lumps of matter is refuted. In the first case it is refuted by what it presupposes: the continuous life of “involvement”, suffused with normativity, running in the background. In the second case “We are mere lumps of matter” is merely the expression of a pathological state, on a par with “I am Napoleon”, “Hilary Clinton is a Reptilian” etc. Both cases also

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 53.

²⁸ Fiona Ellis, *God, Value, and Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 26.

²⁹ See also Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Methuen 1974), chp. 1.

³⁰ If it is not the verbal expression of the harmless detachment discussed above.

face the problem of internal incoherence; both carry normative commitments, which can be ascribed to *mere* lumps of matter only on pain of contradiction.

We have explained, with Strawson's help, the logic of detachment to which reductive naturalists subscribe. Does this not explain the alienation from mankind of the three groups of philosophers described above, the zealots, the hermits and the hopeful believers? It certainly explains the alienation of those among them who are reductive naturalists. But not all zealots, hermits and hopeful believers are reductive naturalists. However, as Strawson points out, detachment and self-alienation are inclinations we all possess. To the extent to which philosophers are detaching themselves from the moral state of mankind and developing "castles in the air",³¹ they are subscribing to some version of the logic of detachment.

Points Missing in Strawson's Account

This, however, is not the whole story. There are some things missing in Strawson's account. One is the status of the philosophical stance itself. A second is an explanation why humans, including philosophers, are so interested in engaging so persistently in detachment. And the third is an inquiry to see whether there are not some issues about detachment and self-alienation that point beyond them, issues of possibly major importance for the understanding of our condition.

It is a curious aspect of Strawson's argument that he does not realise that the position of neutrality he adopts is precisely a kind of third position between reductive and non-reductive naturalism. This is the case even if the attempt, just made, to refute reductive naturalism is not accepted. For on Strawson's account we have two standpoints sharply opposed to one another. From the involved point of view reductive naturalism looks morally repugnant; from the detached point of view looking at the world without our morally coloured spectacles is to see it aright.³² It is only when taking a superior stance, *detached* from this conflict between two worldviews, that we obtain a true, and self-pacifying, understanding of the conflict. As long as we remain involved in one of the two sides, each professing an exclusivity claim, we remain captives to a one-sided

³¹ Kant, *Die falsche Spitzfindigkeit der vier syllogistischen Figuren erwiesen* (1762), *Gesammelte Schriften*, Ak. 2:57.

³² Strawson, in his characteristic fashion, tries to downplay the contrast at times. See Strawson, *Scepticism*, 43.

point of view. Such an exclusivity claim excludes itself, as it were. The superior, neutral third stance is of course that of philosophical reflection.

The remarkable thing about this philosophical reflection, however, is that it does not simply *reject* involvement with the other two positions, but rather presupposes prior involvement with them. The positions can be only overcome, if they are initially known, from the inside, from the “engaged” point of view. But even the philosopher does not remain permanently in the new state. He will lapse back to the “natural” attitude, which (depending on how we interpret Strawson’s argument) either includes reductive naturalism as a sub-variety of non-reductive naturalism or sees reductive and non-reductive naturalism as on a par, neither as more superior than the other from a logical point of view. The structure of philosophical reflection, as it applies here, involves a movement of switching into and out of detachment from the ways of our lives. What can be reproached to the philosophers described above as alienated from the moral state of mankind is not simply that they are detached from their own lives, for that is a necessary condition for philosophy. It is rather that (a) they don’t realise they are in a position of detachment (thus merely adhering to first-order detachment, as found in reductive naturalism), (b) they don’t see that they constantly reconnect to the “natural” attitude, and (c) miss, for this reason, the genuinely philosophical stance.

Another point not addressed by Strawson concerns the question of the *motivation* to engage so persistently in detachment. His account presents it as a mere natural tendency (which can turn into something pathological) that humans, and especially philosophers, choose the reductivist standpoint. This requires explanation especially from Strawson’s non-reductive point of view, since this view commits us to *paying tribute to everybody’s humanity*, including the humanity of the reductivist philosopher.

What might be then the gratification a reductive philosopher obtains from the idle wheels he turns and the castles he builds in the air? I can think of three answers at this stage. The philosopher might be involved in a strategy of detachment in order (a) to bust myths, (b) to create myths or (c) to take refuge from the sorrows of life.

The myth-busting motive was suggested by Wittgenstein. In his critical discussion of Freud’s psychoanalysis, Wittgenstein questions Freud’s appeal to a principle of explanation that posits hidden causal mechanisms

in the human psyche.³³ The plausibility of Freud's theory of the unconscious rests on two things, cultural prestige and imaginative speculation. The scientific mode of thinking, in particular the reduction of a "surface" phenomenon to something "deep" or "hidden", has, for good reasons, enormous prestige in our culture. This makes it a natural candidate for our general tendency to imaginatively extend methods, ideas, pictures beyond their legitimate boundaries. Dreams "really" are just the expression of unfulfilled sexual desires etc. In offering such explanations, we feel empowered, rising above the crowd, detaching ourselves from it; we are myth busters, destroyers of the prejudices of more naïve humans. For, as Wittgenstein puts it, "It is charming to destroy prejudice".³⁴

This motive drives those contemporary philosophers who go for a reasoning pattern of the form "X is really just Y". One example are those who embrace a reductionist theory of the mind, e.g. that mental phenomena are really just brain phenomena etc. A related theory attempts to explain everything humans think and do by reference to our evolutionary development. What we call "love" is really just a behavioural pattern that has given us an evolutionary advantage etc. Of course, philosophical analysis tends to be practised as a reductive method quite generally today, especially among the hermits. What goes under the label of "explanation or definition of a concept" is often tantamount to the reduction of the concept to another concept, taken to be more basic, less problematic, maybe more easily formalisable. An example for this is the claim in the philosophy of language, going back to Frege, that the meaning of a sentence can be explained in terms of the apparently less problematic and more elementary concepts of functional application and possible worlds.³⁵ Other examples, equally phantasmagorical, are notions such as "quantified beliefs" or "all available evidence", which formal epistemologists employ to

³³ For more on Wittgenstein on Freud, see Jacques Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud: The Myth of the Unconscious*, trans. Carol Cosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Kanterian, *Ludwig Wittgenstein* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007); Edward Harcourt, "Wittgenstein and Psychoanalysis," in *A Companion to Wittgenstein*, eds. Hans-Johann Glock and John Hyman (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 651–66.

³⁴ Wittgenstein, *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 24.

³⁵ Cf. Irene Heim and Angelika Kratzer, *Semantics in Generative Grammar* (Malden: Blackwell, 1998) for just one example for a handbook on semantics based on this fundamental error. For a critical discussion of Frege's views, motivating this error, see Kanterian, *Frege: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

explain what humdrum verbs such as “to believe” and “to trust” allegedly really mean.³⁶

The myth-busting motive makes it understandable why some philosophers find deep satisfaction in reductive explanations. But this cannot be the whole story. There are other motivational aspects of the hermits’ detachment from the world, not to mention of the philosophers in the other two groups. One other aspect was just indicated: the phantasmagorical character of philosophical theories. We find it charming to bust myths, but we also find it charming to create new ones. Reductionists and revisionists of our conceptual schemes are mythmakers. They invent pictures and simplified stories, project them onto the confusingly complex (linguistic-conceptual) reality, press phenomena into a standardised pattern, and take pleasure in the order they believe to be discovering thereby. Wittgenstein saw this clearly with respect to Freud. Freud’s explanations, Wittgenstein argued, have themselves the character of myths.

Take Freud’s view that anxiety is always a repetition in some way of the anxiety we felt at birth. He does not establish this by reference to evidence – for he could not do so. But it is an idea which has [...] the attraction which mythological explanations have, explanations which say that this is all a repetition of something that has happened before.³⁷

This is also valid for philosophers’ attraction to phantasmagorical points of view, as they are propounded not only by hermits, but also by members of the other two groups. It suggests that there is an aesthetic and even mythological element involved in philosophical theorising of the detached type.

The Platonising Attitude

There is something perplexing about the fact that philosophers are engaged in mythmaking, even after more than 2000 years of activity, even in the most advanced, theoretically most sophisticated areas of contemporary research. Humans seem to enjoy creating distorted representations of reality, including the reality which is theirs. This tendency is particularly salient in modern art. But it seems that even philosophy is not free of it. Not many thinkers have reflected on this. Kant and Wittgenstein come to mind, since their work involved not only the uncovering of

³⁶ Cf. Glenn Shafer, *A Mathematical Theory of Evidence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

³⁷ Wittgenstein, *Lectures*, 43.

philosophical myths, but also an explanation of the roots of philosophical mythmaking. But their ideas have been explored in such great detail that they don't need to be rehearsed here again.³⁸ A striking, little known analysis, but most relevant to my discussion, was offered by the Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica (1909–1987), in his book *Mathesis sau bucuriile simple* (*Mathesis, or the Simple Joys*), published in 1934.³⁹

Noica distinguishes between cultures of a historical and of a mathematical type. In historical cultures the world is assumed to be something real, alive, directly given. In them the flow of time, the present moment, the chaos of life, the concept of destiny have priority.⁴⁰ They are cultures that belong to nature. Mathematical cultures, by contrast, belong to the spirit. They are characterised by the geometrical spirit, to which belong formal order, unification, subjectivism and constructivism, immanence and atemporality. These features are interrelated. The geometrical spirit subscribes to the primacy of the “artificial over the given”.⁴¹ It unifies the messy “data” and imposes onto them the orders it itself constructs. Human reason finds in nature only what it has itself put into it. In engaging in science, mathematics, philosophy, even culture at large, human reason, in its geometrical stance, only seeks the encounter with itself. Noica refers to Kant here, whom he takes to be a main exponent of our mathematical culture, like Plato, Descartes, Leibniz and Husserl.⁴²

Although no civilisation is entirely of the one or the other sort, Western culture is at its core of the mathematical type, which Noica welcomes and defends. The philosophy it generates does not aim to understand or merely to be involved in the messiness of life, but quite the opposite. It *flees* life. One “cannot formalise anything unless it has been

³⁸ Their most relevant works are, for Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (1766) and *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and for Wittgenstein, most of his later writings.

³⁹ For more on Noica, see Kanterian, “Hegel’s Tale in Romania,” in *Hegel’s Thought in Europe: Currents, Crosscurrents and Undercurrents*, ed. Lisa Herzog (London: Palgrave, 2013), 49–68, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137309228_4. Three books by this remarkable philosopher have been translated into English so far: Constantin Noica, *Becoming Within Being*, trans. Alistair Blyth (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009), idem, *Six Maladies of the Contemporary Spirit*, trans. Alistair Blyth (Plymouth: University of Plymouth Press, 2009) and idem, *The Romanian Sentiment of Being*, trans. Octavian and Elena Gabor (Santa Barbara: Punctum Books, 2022).

⁴⁰ Noica, *Mathesis sau bucuriile simple* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1992), 18.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 15.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 11, 13. Cf. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bxviii, A125.

brought to rest. Water can only be described when it is frozen. What is *alive* cannot be grasped – at least not through the means to which our culture has committed itself from the outset”.⁴³ But while our culture cannot capture life, we can be confident that one day, “a happy day from a scientific point of view”, our culture will give an answer to all well-formulated questions.

Noica gives as an example for this attitude the school of French positivism, which tried to mathematicize all sciences.⁴⁴ He could have equally well referred to one of the founding documents of analytic philosophy, the manifest *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung* (1929) of the Vienna Circle, according to which the only meaningful questions are those that can be answered by logic or scientific experiments. Questions such as “Is there a God?” or “What is the meaning of life?” drop out as nonsense on this view.⁴⁵ Since this is the spirit in which much of analytic philosophy has been carried out, we are beginning to understand, with Noica’s help, not only the detached attitude of the hermits, but also that of the zealots, with their disproportionate belief in the goodness of the future. Both try to flee away from the unsavoury, unpleasant present. But this means that they too are saddled with the burden of existence. Their forms of detachment are simply strategies of coping with this burden, according to Noica. This is evident from the aspects of immanence and atemporality that characterise mathematical cultures. Mathematical structures are atemporal objects of self-sufficient contemplation.

When you take a triangle and consider a problem about it, you don’t think for a moment about any external existence or the framework you have set for yourself. The geometrical fact does not make the intellect go beyond itself. [...] In a sense, the whole of geometry is in us and never transcends us, no matter how many things we draw on paper.⁴⁶

When we do mathematics, we don’t learn anything about real things, but remain in the realm of pure, infinite possibilities. This, according to Noica, has a major advantage: it makes us avoid or boycott history. We must shun history. History is tantamount to transience and perishability, and it represents merely one among infinitely many possible worlds.

⁴³ Noica, *Mathesis*, 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 10.

⁴⁵ Verein Ernst Mach, ed., *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung. Der Wiener Kreis* (Vienna: Artur Wolf, 1929).

⁴⁶ Noica, *Mathesis*, 16–17.

“Ah, history! How am I not to hate it, to reject it with all the orderly sensibility I have in myself! This messy, asymmetrical history. [...] This non-geometry.”⁴⁷ We see here clearly that Noica’s “mathematical” thinker is not without an inner life, not oblivious to his own mortality. He knows that all things perish and decay, and this troubles him. So he chooses an activity that connects him, he imagines, with eternity, the realm of ideas, in which nothing perishes.⁴⁸

Noica’s text, written in beautiful, poetic prose, confers a lot of dignity to the Platonising detachment from the world. It presents this detachment as a human drama, characterised by a kind of nobility. Of course, one may wonder what evidence there is in favour of Noica’s diagnosis. Philosophers engaged in what according to his analysis is a form of detachment from the burden of time and history might simply deny, in all honesty, that his analysis applies to them. They, the hermits and the zealots, don’t care about their death and mortality when they speculate about “absolute generality”, “belief functions”, “the set of all possible worlds”, etc., or when they fantasize about the bright future awaiting the species. But perhaps like other humans, philosophers too may fail to know themselves and might miss the point of their lives.

This brings us back to a problem we encountered in Strawson as well, in his failure to account for the position of philosophical reflection itself. We saw that philosophical reflection is a third position, one that presupposes, but also transcends the opposing views of non-reductive and reductive naturalism. This third position cannot be achieved by remaining attached to one of the two lower level views. It requires instead reflection about oneself, as one is immersed in the course of life (non-reductive naturalism) *and* then detached from it in one’s theoretical beliefs. The problem with the non-reductive naturalist was that while he is *de facto* immersed in the course of life, he adopts *de jure* a theoretical position that does not consciously reflect that. The Platonising detachment from the world is similarly unreflected. The Platonist’s position is merely *characteristic* of his rootedness in life, since it is a human option, a reactive attitude to his own existence. He flees from what he is troubled by, but does not work his way, as a philosopher, through the source of his fear. This is why his theory, or rather his whole mode of thinking, even the topics he

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 39.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 33.

immerses himself in, like Noica's geometer, look so alien when compared to the world around him – because they are meant to have as little as possible to do with the troubles of mankind. But this sharp, unmediated antagonism betrays their existential role. They are human attempts, opaque to themselves, to escape the human predicament. Our alien is beginning to understand the discrepancy that initially puzzled him.

The Religious Temperament

The view presented here has something in common with, but also differs somewhat from the view defended by Thomas Nagel in his recent essay "Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperament" (2010).⁴⁹ Nagel argues that contemporary philosophy, especially in its analytic strand, is thoroughly secular. Not only does it not provide an alternative to the consolations of religion, but it denies that it is meaningful to seek out such consolation. Hard physical science explains the universe in a way that does not affect the sense we make of our lives. It does not offer "an understanding of the totality of which we are a part [that] can in turn become part of the self-understanding by which we live".⁵⁰ Whether or not the charge of an electron can be given a more precise measurement, whether or not the Higgs boson really exists – either alternative will be acceptable, if supported by solid investigation, and will contribute to the unstoppable progress of science. Following this model, philosophy aims today also for a detached understanding of reality.⁵¹ It is simply driven by intellectual curiosity and it will accept whatever answers turn out to be the right ones, without that having any deep transformative effect on the questioner. Possible worlds are real objects, existing independently from each other, or they are just reconfigurations of our actual world – either answer will do, given the better argument.⁵² The meaning of the logical constants is fully stipulated by their introduction and elimination rules,

⁴⁹ For a related view, see Ronald Dworkin, *Religion without God* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁵⁰ Thomas Nagel, *Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperament: Essays 2002-2008* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 3.

⁵² Cf. David Lewis, *On The Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Robert Stalnaker, "Possible worlds," *Noûs* 10, no. 1 (March 1976): 65–75.

or it is stipulated by additional logical facts or constraints – again, either answer will do, given the better argument.⁵³ And so on.

Nagel does not ridicule this Stoic position, which sounds very much like that of the “hermits”. But he still considers it to be a wrongheaded form of detachment, an evasion from what he calls the “cosmic question”: “Is there a way to live in harmony with the universe, and not just in it?”; or, more simply, “What am I doing here?”.⁵⁴ This question arises from a “desire for completion”, which Nagel calls the religious temperament. It attempts to make sense not simply of our lives, but of the universe as a whole, and of our lives in relation to it. Obviously, religions provide an answer to this question. They allow believers to live “a life in the sight of God” or some other spiritual thing that represents the deepest reality of the universe.⁵⁵ Nagel argues that one can possess the religious temperament even if one, like Nagel himself, does not subscribe to a particular religion. The cosmic question makes sense, no matter how much science and secular philosophy have pushed aside religion in the public discourse in the West. Philosophers like Plato were driven by this question. Humanists, like Kant, Sidgwick and Rawls, were also driven by it, Nagel argues, even though they only managed to give an “imminent” answer to it.⁵⁶ At the bottom of their theories lies a faith in humanity and its moral progress, which transcends the individual, but rests content with an understanding of “eternity” or “totality” as limited to the community of rational creatures. Clearly, these are the hopeful believers mentioned above. Their modesty consists in giving at least some answer to the cosmic question, if only with respect to a sub-set, not to the whole of reality. This is no surprise. For, as Nagel argues, the cosmic question is a deeply philosophical one.

The question results from one of those stepping back that constitutes the essence of philosophy. We find the familiar unfamiliar by reflecting

⁵³ Cf. Arthur Prior, “The Runabout Inference-ticket,” *Analysis* 21, no. 2 (December 1960): 38–39; Nuel Belnap, “Tonk, Plonk and Plink,” *Analysis* 22, no. 6 (June 1962): 130–34. Note that I am not denying here that such philosophical debates cannot be conducted, and even solved, by rational argument. My focus here is on the role such debates have in relation to the existential phenomena of involvement and detachment.

⁵⁴ Nagel, *Secular*, 5, 8.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 5.

⁵⁶ This may be true of Sidgwick and Rawls, but it is not true of Kant. Kant offered not only a humanist response to the cosmic question, but a more genuinely religious one. See Kanterian, *Kant*.

on features of our situation, or forms of thought and action, so central and pervasive that we are ordinarily submerged in them without paying notice.⁵⁷

Nagel reconstructs the religious temperament in the following way:

We wake up from our familiar surroundings to find ourselves, already elaborately formed by biology and culture, amazingly in existence, in the midst of the contingency of the world, and suddenly we do not know where we are or what we are. We recognize that we are products of the world and its history, generated and sustained in existence in ways we hardly understand, so that in a sense every individual life represents far more than itself. It is a short step, easily taken on a starry night, to thinking that one is a small representative of the whole of existence. That creates in susceptible minds the need to grasp that life and if possible to lead it as part of something larger – perhaps even as part of the life of the universe.⁵⁸

What Nagel describes here, very plausibly, is of course a thought process as old as philosophy. Like reductive naturalism and the Platonising attitude, it involves a form of detachment, from the immediate course of life. But unlike those two positions, it does not try to deny or reject empirical life, but transform it, by embedding it into something much larger. This is pointing towards the attitude I have identified above as the genuinely philosophical stance, the “third position”, the position of reflected detachment. But that is not quite Nagel’s account. In his view secular, analytic philosophers are simply evading the cosmic question. But how can this be, if the cosmic question arises from a logic of detachment that belongs to the essence of philosophy? Nagel is not able to explain why so many contemporary philosophers miss something so obvious and easily explained as the cosmic question. This is because he does not engage in the wider anthropological inquiry, which would account both for the emergence of the religious temperament *and* its denial. Such an inquiry was hinted at above, in the discussion of naturalism and the Platonising attitude.

Nagel does not look at the human predicament, as the common root of these two phenomena. His focus on the cosmic question is valuable, because it deepens our inquiry into the logic of detachment. But his “derivation” of the cosmic question, quoted above, does not address what

⁵⁷ Nagel, *Secular*, 9.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 9.

is so peculiar, or maybe so deficient, about us that we develop a desire for completion and totality in the first place. Other animals don't have this desire. They live in their environment, and they don't ask themselves "Why am I here?" or "What may I hope?", nor do they reject such questions as meaningless. So why do we ask the cosmic question, or evade it?

A Forgotten Tradition: Petrarch's Example

To answer this question, we need to become clearer about an issue which was mostly implicit in the views of the thinkers I have considered so far (Strawson, Wittgenstein, Noica, Nagel). This requires a better understanding of the sort of creatures we are. We need, in other words, hermeneutics, i.e. what Cottingham calls an "epistemology of involvement" and Nagel calls the reflection on "features of our situation, or forms of thought and action, so central and pervasive that we are ordinarily submerged in them without paying notice".⁵⁹ But some features of our situation might escape even this method, especially if they have fallen out of our philosophical sight. For this reason it can be a useful exercise to change tack and consult a tradition alien to us, to the sensibility of 21st century analytic philosophers.

The issue I am concerned with can be traced from at least Plato to early 20th century philosophers in the continental tradition. Nagel is not oblivious to it, although he mentions it only *en passant*. He points out that Plato had not only a religious temperament, but that he also "suffered from a version of the more characteristically Judeo-Christian conviction that we are all miserable sinners", and that he "hoped for some form of redemption from philosophy".⁶⁰ This motif, *the fallenness, wickedness and frailty of man*, was a pervasive topic in European philosophy for much of its history. It is a motif that is entirely absent not only in the theorising of today's zealots and hermits, but missing even from the considerations of the hopeful believers. To elaborate, I will limit myself to only one example, from the earliest period of the modern age, that of Francesco Petrarch's moral anthropology.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Cottingham, *Philosophy*, 22; Nagel, *Secular*, 9.

⁶⁰ Nagel, *Secular*, 6.

⁶¹ While my focus is here the early modern period, it should be noted, as one anonymous reviewer has pointed out to me, that ancient and Hellenistic philosophers, especially in the sceptical tradition, were perfectly aware of the problem I am trying to ad-

Petrarch lived at the end of the Middle Ages, in the 14th century, but in some respects he was a modern man, and also a major forerunner to Renaissance humanism. He was a humanist in the strict sense, a teacher and student of the *studia humanitatis*, comprising grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and moral philosophy.⁶² He was a humanist in the wider sense as well. He harboured a passion for ancient authors, especially for Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Vergil, discovered forgotten ancient manuscripts, cultivated an elegant writing style, and he disliked scholastic philosophy and its dry style. He was modern to the extent that he was much preoccupied with himself. One aspect of this was a certain self-indulgence. Like other humanists, he liked the genre of letters, which allowed him to write from the first-person point of view. He also sought fame, was curious about the world and enjoyed travelling around, “a forerunner of modern tourism”, as Kristeller has described him.⁶³ Petrarch was also inclined to solitude, and melancholy, *accidia*. *Accidia* had been considered a vice in medieval monastic life. It is true that in one (famous) passage, from his dialogue *Secretum meum* (ca.1347–1353), published only posthumously, he gave this feeling a more positive gloss, admitting that it involved a form of suffering that was also enjoyable.⁶⁴ Still, he characterised it overall as a deadly plague of the spirit, and the joy it involved he actually considered to be a false joy.⁶⁵ “In this sadness”, he wrote, “everything is bitter, miserable and terrible”.

This plague holds me at times so tight in its grip that it chains and tortures me for days and nights. During such periods there is nothing of light and life for me, but only ever so much hellish night and most bitter death. Moreover, and this can be called the pinnacle of misfortune, I revel so much with a sort of dark delight in my tears and pains, that only reluctantly do I wrest myself free from it.⁶⁶

It is important to realize that Petrarch is not simply interested in a dispassionate theory of the mind, but rather in a self-examination that aims, at

dress in this essay. See e.g. Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002).

⁶² Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), 3.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, 13.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 15.

⁶⁵ Francesco Petrarca [Petrarch], *Secretum meum* (Mainz: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2013), 179. My translation.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, 181.

least in principle, for a therapeutic resolution. But the ill from which he suffers is not simply a matter of individual psychology. As *Secretum meum*, and other works, suggest, Petrarch identifies here a general anthropological problem, which is merely exemplified by *accidia*. Other examples of regrettable inclinations are envy, arrogance, avarice, ambition etc.⁶⁷ The root of all these is the fundamental fallenness of man. This manifests itself not only in our proneness for those vices, but also in our restlessness, our mortality and the weakness of our reason. Our inner life is in constant motion, hardly ever managing to come to peaceful contemplation. Our mind is overwhelmed, indeed “picked and slashed to pieces” by “a deadly variety” of sensory impressions.⁶⁸ We are also harassed by countless worries that constantly compete against each other, keeping the mind unstable even when it has taken a good resolution. This leads to an “inner discord [...] and distress of the soul that is angry with itself, disgusted by its own dirt, without removing it, recognising its own devious paths, without quitting them, fearing the imminent danger, without averting it”.⁶⁹ When Francis, the protagonist undergoing treatment in *Secretum meum*, announces that he aims to reach happiness by pursuing a self-sufficient, harmonious life, “living neither in hardship nor in abundance, neither presiding over others nor being subordinate to them”, he sounds like today’s hopeful believers in a way of life, which, guided by good intentions and maybe some theoretical calculations, may bring happiness to most of us. Augustine, the “instructing”, wiser interlocutor, rebuts this hope sharply: “You would have to abandon your humanity and become a god in order to cease being afflicted by hardship. Don’t you know that man is the most destitute/needy [egentissimum] of all animals?”⁷⁰ There follows a longer paragraph outlining the destituteness of man, from his birth to his death.

He has a frail body, a restless mind, is assailed by numerous illnesses, succumbs to countless passions, is clueless, sways between joy and happiness, cannot finalise a decision, is unable to restrain his appetites, does not know what is good for him, and how much of it [...]. He is greedy and fearful, does not want anymore what he has already acquired, bewails what he has lost, and is at all times worried about the

⁶⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, 131.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 97.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 101, 103.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, 150.

present, past and future things, haughty when struck by misfortune, while still aware of his frailty. He is inferior to the lowest worms, has a short life, an uncertain life span, an inevitable fate, and is exposed to a thousand possible kinds of death. [...] Stop hoping for the impossible, be content with your human fate, learn to live in exuberance and hardship, and to preside over and be subordinate to others. Live thus, and do not try to overcome the burden of your lot, which hangs even around the neck of kings.⁷¹

True happiness, Augustine tells Francis, will only be reached if one acquiesces in one's fate, defeats one's passions and lives under the rule of virtue. But Petrarch remains realistic enough even about this resolution, for Francis retorts: "Already I regret what I have done, and I desire to not desire. But perverse habit carries me away, and I always feel something unfulfilled in my heart."⁷² There is no simple solution, no practical syllogism to solve the human predicament, for Petrarch. All is vanity. Reason and knowledge offer no salvation either.⁷³ Particularly useless are the "dialecticians", i.e. the formal philosophers of his time, who sketch countless definitions, but have no understanding of anything, especially not of what humans are. They behave in an arrogant way, but are really to be pitied, for they torture their own minds with "futile pitfalls" and have forgotten reality.⁷⁴ Clearly, Petrarch is less forgiving towards certain forms of philosophical detachment than, say, Noica. But philosophy still has a useful role, even for Petrarch. It consists precisely in this, the recognition of reality, the full nature of man. The main object of philosophy is man and his problems, as he argues elsewhere.⁷⁵ Philosophy is moral philosophy for him, although not the discipline detached from its practitioner, as this is the case today. Philosophy looks at humans as they really are, with all their limitations.

The reason why Petrarch has a rather accurate and undistorted anthropology is connected to his religious temperament. But unlike Nagel's understanding of it, his religious temperament is not simply aiming for an integrative recognition of man's position in the universe. Petrarch thinks that *there is something wrong with mankind*, and integrative recognition

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, 151.

⁷² *Ibidem*, 155.

⁷³ Cf. *ibidem*, 91, 287, 315, 389.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, 69, 71.

⁷⁵ See Kristeller, *Eight*, 15.

will not change that. Of course, to speak of something being wrong with mankind is just another way of speaking of its wickedness, of the many ways in which it is connected to *evil*. Can anything change its state? The first imperative, raised by the interlocutor Augustine in *Secretum meum*, is to truly know oneself, the miserable condition we find ourselves in. This might not be so easily accomplished, given the restlessness of our minds. But it is knowledge that we already have, if “knowledge” is the right term. What philosophy can do, is teach techniques that remind us of our condition, help us reflect on our suffering and mortality. This is done repeatedly in *Secretum meum*. Death has a central role here. At one point a detailed description of a dying man is given, of how his extremities are slowly becoming cold, while the body is heating up and dissolving in sweat, how the eyes are watery and tearful, the cheeks shrunk in, the teeth yellow, the lips foamy, the whole human covered in stench, etc.⁷⁶ Compare this with Nagel’s more harmless “We wake up from our familiar surroundings to find ourselves, already elaborately formed by biology and culture, amazingly in existence.”⁷⁷

For Petrarch, philosophy’s first role is to remind us of our creatureliness, to teach us how to die. His protagonist Augustine quotes Cicero: “The whole life of the philosophers is a preparation for death.”⁷⁸ But philosophy has a second role as well, which is inseparable from the first, lest philosophy be a pointless suicidal exercise: to develop an intense desire and striving to ascend, to reach the higher. This, of course, is God, the source of the good and the true.⁷⁹ In *Secretum meum* God is appealed to only occasionally, as an object of faith and love, not as an object of knowledge, but elsewhere Petrarch leaves no doubt that he is first and foremost “not a Ciceronian or a Platonist, but a Christian”.⁸⁰ This is why he is inclined to “practical” philosophy, to a way of changing himself. Working on the will is more important than gaining theoretical knowledge. In his *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* [*On His Own Ignorance and that of Many Others*] (1367–1370), Petrarch argues that “it is safer to cultivate a good and pious will than a capable and clear intellect”, since goodness is the object of the will. It is therefore better to love God, rather than to try

⁷⁶ Petrarch, *Secretum*, 75, 77; cf. also 65, 89, 243, 325, 385.

⁷⁷ Nagel, *Secular*, 9.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, 395.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, 37, 39, 261, 289.

⁸⁰ Kristeller, *Eight*, 11.

to know him. One can love something ardently, without fully knowing it, as is the case with God.⁸¹

Petrarch's moral anthropology could not be further removed from a philosophy that is detached from the moral state of mankind. At the same time, he reaches a position structurally similar to Strawson's, a third position which requires a reasoned dialectic of attachment and detachment. This third position, that of a truly enlightened philosophy, transcends both natural man and his theoretical self-misunderstanding, while accounting for the very possibility of that misunderstanding, which for Petrarch is just another aspect of our fallenness. This self-misunderstanding takes many forms, of which a few were mentioned above (the zealots, the hermits/Noica's Platonisers, the hopeful believers). Noica works out elements of the sublime found in the Platonising attitude, which points to Nagel's attempt to make sense of the cosmic question in a non-naturalistic and not merely humanistic way. The sublime and the cosmic question are evidently in Petrarch as well, but his anthropology has deeper roots and branches reaching far higher. Moreover, his focus is on offering a heuristic method for the actual transformation or even rebirth of the patient in question – in the first place the philosopher himself. The framework of this heuristic is for Petrarch genuine religious faith, Christianity more specifically. Such a framework is difficult to accept, but without it, as Nagel admits at the end of his essay, the cosmic question leaves us with a sense of the absurd.⁸²

Petrarch was a brilliant writer, but not an altogether original thinker. His ideas were based on various sources, for example on the medieval *De contemptu mundi* tradition, on Plato, Cicero, Augustine, and others.⁸³ *Secretum deum* is a beautiful dialogue, but its moral anthropology was not unique to Petrarch. Similar positions were articulated by others as well, during the Renaissance and the Reformation. Ficino, Valla, Luther, Calvin, Montaigne, and many others, were much concerned with their own frailty, and that of man in general. Luther, for example, thought that metaphysics is a misguided discipline, because it is obsessed with the present state of things, merely interested in describing their essence by

⁸¹ Cf. *Ibidem*, 17.

⁸² Nagel, *Secular*, 17.

⁸³ Cf. Margaret Holland, "Petrarch and *De contemptu mundi*," *The European Legacy* 2, no. 4 (1997): 730–32, doi:10.1080/10848779708579802; Bernhard Huss and Gerhard Regn, "Kommentar," in Petrarca, *Secretum*, 403ff.

means of Aristotle's abstract categories. It is thus "a study of empty illusion", since it fails to see a creature's creatureliness, focusing on what it is, rather than on what it *desires* to be. Man abhors the present and longs for his salvations. He is, for Luther, directed towards the future.⁸⁴ "We praise a science dealing with that which is saddened by itself and unhappy", he wrote, a "gay science" which overhears "the sighing of the creature".

This weakness or fallenness motif continued throughout modern philosophy, in Malebranche, Pascal, Locke, even Hume and Kant, in Schopenhauer, and in some of the early 20th century German philosophers.⁸⁵ But it then fell out of sight, even in the continental tradition, and it was hardly ever an issue in the analytic quarter. Is it because the problem has been solved? "Only madmen", Petrarch writes, "would not at least sometimes realise their own frailty, the feebleness of their body, their mortality".⁸⁶ Philosophers today seem to have forgotten, as philosophers, about their all too human condition. Is this forgetfulness itself not all too human? It probably is. But philosophy is in the business of truth and has a duty to account for everything there is, including the condition of those who practice it. And the fact remains that they do not hear the "sighing of the creature" any longer, or, if they hear it, they ignore it and or at best relegate it to psychology or literature.⁸⁷ I have tried to indicate some reasons for this failure, not all of which are historical or based on the darkness of the age. Nor are they all based on errors that can be easily rectified. This failure, I have suggested, needs to be explored with charity, because it is generated by the *alien in us*. Patterns of religious understanding, with their necessary reference to notions of fallenness, wickedness, evil, might be of help here, to cast some light on what and who we are. Nevertheless, the failure is not excusable.

⁸⁴ See his lectures on the Epistle to the Romans (WA 56, 371f.). See also his *Disputation Against Scholastic Philosophy* (WA 1, 224ff.). Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar: Herman Böhlau, 1883–2009). Calvin shared this attitude towards philosophy, see Richard Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 122.

⁸⁵ For example in Heidegger, Jaspers and Scheler. For more discussion of the earlier part of this tradition, see Tonelli, "The «Weakness» of Reason"; Kanterian, *Kant*.

⁸⁶ Petrarch, *Secretum*, 63, 65.

⁸⁷ I am speaking here also from personal experience, having witnessed time and again how professional philosophers, especially in the analytic camp, dismiss or avoid the topics discussed in this essay with an almost Freudian anxiety.

Plotin, raconte Porphyre, avait le don de lire dans les âmes. Un jour, sans autre préambule, il dit à son disciple, grandement surpris, de ne pas tenter de se tuer et d'entreprendre plutôt un voyage. Porphyre partit pour la Sicile: il s'y guérit de sa mélancolie mais, ajoute-t-il plein de regret, il manqua ainsi la mort de son maître, survenue pendant son absence.

Il y a longtemps que les philosophes ne lisent plus les âmes. Ce n'est pas leur métier, dira-t-on. C'est possible. Mais aussi qu'on ne s'étonne pas s'ils ne nous importent plus guère.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Emil Cioran, *De l'inconvénient d'être né* (1973), here cited from Cioran, *Œuvres* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2011), 762.

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“The Power of the One Needs the Stupidity of the Other.”¹ Bonhoeffer’s Theory of Stupidity and Analysis of its Socio-political Impact

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Abstract: *Stupidity is a greater evil than evil itself. This could be the synthesis of the theory put forward by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was a Protestant pastor, theologian, counter-intelligence officer, and martyr, whose work decisively influenced the subsequent evolution of the relationship between society and theology. One of the most fascinating aspects of his thinking is represented by the theorization of stupidity, which appears in his meditation “After Ten Years,” where he outlines the disastrous consequences of human stupidity, as well as how stupidity – as a form of legitimizing evil – can be stopped. The greatest evil that society must confront is imbecility. But what is its connection to political (or radical) evil, and how can we stop its disastrous consequences?*

Keywords: *Bonhoeffer, Theory of Stupidity, Political Evil, Radical Evil, Socio-political Implications, Legitimization, Liberation Education, the Legitimization of Power*

Preliminary

We live in a world increasingly burdened by suffering. The suffering, rooted in a generalized state of crisis, is largely attributable to the low level of flexibility inherent in social constructs. It is not surprising, in this regard, to observe, upon a superficial glance, that political decision-makers enact measures that are contradictory and antagonistic to their own beliefs. The issue does not lie in a lack of ideological principles but in the docility of citizens who, in the face of increasing depersonalization, are capable of legitimizing decisions beyond their comprehension, causing irreversible harm. The existence of such a low level of understanding of their own dignity leads to the legitimization of actions that are illegitimate. In such a society lived Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Protestant pastor,

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John W. de Grunchy (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 43.

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theologian, intelligence officer, and martyr. He reflected on the deficiency that society encounters in its development and termed this lack, which leads to unimaginable social evil, as *stupidity*. Bonhoeffer's theory of stupidity, beyond being a purely theological reflection, has extraordinary sociological implications. How can a political regime that produces so much harm exist, and how can respectable citizens agree to such actions? The myriad of answers coalesces, in the work of the great theologian, into a single word: *stupidity*.

Stupidity does not refer, in his thinking, to mental disorder, but to a sociological problem. The stupid person is much more dangerous than the evil one, not because their actions are inherently evil, but because, through their stupidity, they create an abnormal society, devoid of values and principles, and equally because, in the face of stupidity, there is no defense, no way to retaliate. A major flaw of stupid people, which affects the entire community, is that they are easily manipulated, they are docile towards a tyrannical political power, towards a dictator who legitimizes their own power through the stupidity of the citizens. Certainly, Bonhoeffer was writing in a period when Germany was under the terrible Nazi leadership, but what fascinates the pastor is the docility of people in the face of absurd leadership. Faced with such a problem, the stupidity of a *world's coming of age* can be resolved through both inner and outer liberation.

Throughout this work, we will try to find out how society is affected by stupidity, giving an answer, through Bonhoeffer's words, to the question that will constitute the hypothesis of the entire work: *Why is stupidity the greatest social (political) evil?* We will try to find out who Dietrich Bonhoeffer was and why the theory of stupidity is still so valid today.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: the pastor who reads *the signs of the times*

There have been many words spoken and written about Dietrich Bonhoeffer,² and perhaps just as many could be said about an incredible life: “ambiguities in his life and thought which have fascinated and

² It is rather difficult to provide an exhaustive bibliography of the writings on the life, activity, and work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, but among the most important we mention Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000); Ferdinand Schlingensiefen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance*, trans. Isabel Best (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2010); Mary Bosanquet, *The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Dorothy M. Emmet (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1968); Edwin H. Robertson, *The Shame and the*

stimulated both his immediate contemporaries and a whole new generation which never met him.”³ Presenting Bonhoeffer’s life, I will not dwell so much on biographical details, but rather on how Bonhoeffer understood the society in which he lived, to help us understand how he shaped his theory about stupidity and its connection to political evil.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in 1906 in Breslau, and six years later he moved to Berlin. After a period of study in Tübingen, Rome, and then Berlin, he was ordained in 1931 and appointed chaplain to students at the Technical University of Berlin. After Hitler’s rise to power in Germany, he went to England to pastor two German communities in London. In 1935, he returned to Germany. Upon his return to his homeland, he was asked to organize a seminary, which, after two years, would be closed. From that moment on, Bonhoeffer would not have a stable home.⁴ In 1939, he traveled to the USA, but did not stay for long. Upon his return to Germany, he joined a group of people conspiring to assassinate Hitler. In 1941, to avoid conscription into the army and to provide cover for the Confessing Church movement, he joined, as a secret informant, the German Military Intelligence Bureau. In 1943, he was arrested on suspicion of helping Jews escape from Germany. After a failed assassination attempt on Hitler on July 20, 1944, clear evidence emerged indicating Bonhoeffer’s involvement in collaborating with the conspirators. He was then transferred from Tegel prison in Berlin to the concentration camp in Buchenwald, and later to the horrific camp in Flossenbürg, where he was hanged on April 9, 1945. Less than a month later, Germany surrendered.⁵

It is crucial to unravel the context in which the meditation “After Ten Years” was written in order to understand Bonhoeffer’s premises, as well as to frame, in a broader context, what would later be called the theory of stupidity. “After Ten Years” fits into the general context of the Protestant

Sacrifice: The Life and Preaching of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987).

³ Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald G. Smith, *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reminiscences of his Friends* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 13; John W. de Gruchy, “Biographies and Portraits,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, eds. Michael Mawson and Philip G. Ziegler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 462.

⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 594.

⁵ For a synthesis of Bonhoeffer’s biography and doctrine as applied to the contemporary world see John P. Burgess, Jerry Andrews and Joseph D. Small, *A Pastoral Rule for Today: Reviving an Ancient Practice* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 144–62.

pastor's faith and his thinking, which sought to find an answer (or rather to offer one) regarding the behavior of the church in the contemporary world and, especially, its challenges. Bonhoeffer was only thirty-six years old when he wrote this essay, and on April 5, 1943, he was arrested (less than four months after writing the essay). In it, the Christian theologian meditates on the world he sees crumbling before his eyes, and on how evil has become inherent in the world. The voice in "After Ten Years" is not the voice of a hero, but the voice of one dismayed by the moral decline of society. Therefore, Bonhoeffer not only calls for involvement for us, our social group, or the political ideology we support, but also for history itself.

In whatever particular historical moment we find ourselves, we are summoned to determine what our place in history will be, to think and act beyond our self-interest for the sake of a common good: not just the common good of the moment, our particular political group, or even our society, but of our times – to act, as Bonhoeffer put it, on behalf of history itself and for the sake of future generations and the kind of society we would wish for them.⁶

The succinctly presented biographical data of Dietrich Bonhoeffer not only help us contextualize his work and thought but also understand that he was a pastor familiar with the world (the worldly pastor). He knew the challenges and needs of the world in which he lived, and in this understanding, he was able to meditate on the major questions of his society. Even though his freedom was restricted, no one could steal his freedom of spirit and depth of thought. Bonhoeffer, in the world in which he lived, represented a point of reference for theological and sociological development, and the relevance of his ideas persists in the world we live in.

What is stupidity?

The ambiguity of the term *stupidity* is what greatly complicates its definition. It is not easy to precisely determine what stupidity refers to or what its main characteristics are precisely because the definition of stupidity does not enjoy much objectivity. However, if we were to refer to stupidity according to the definition provided by the Oxford Dictionary, we would say that: stupidity is "the state, quality, or fact of being stupid or foolish;

⁶ For understanding the entire socio-political context of the emergence of the essay "After Ten Years", we refer to the entire introduction in Barnett, *"After Ten Years": Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Our Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 16.

lack or absence of intelligence, perceptiveness, or common sense". Thus, we observe that stupidity is defined as the lack or absence of intelligence, perceptiveness, or common sense. It is therefore a deficiency; not so much a personal defect, but this deficiency can become a social defect. And it is precisely this viewpoint that belongs to Bonhoeffer. The pastor speaks more about the consequences of stupidity rather than its causes or meanings, but even so, from Bonhoeffer's examples, we can understand some defining aspects of stupidity.

First and foremost, this is not a personal defect or pathology. Personally, I consider this to be the most relevant defining point offered by Bonhoeffer's perspective because stupidity does not affect the person it possesses. Stupidity is neither a disease nor a disorder acquired through biological or psychological defects, but rather *an absence* that does not cause pain. Stupidity does not cause unrest in the heart of the one who is stupid, it does not affect one's natural material or physical construction, it is not visible from a distance, and it does not allow for contradictory interpretations. Imbecility is stupid and that's it. It is quite simple to realize who is stupid and who is not, but it is terribly difficult to fight against it. However, stupidity is the defect of those who allow themselves to be affected by it. This is precisely the pivot of Bonhoeffer's theory: "The impression one gains is not so much that stupidity is a congenital defect but that, under certain circumstances, people are *made* stupid or that they allow this to happen to them."⁷ People are made stupid or allow it to happen to them. Bonhoeffer emphasizes that the defect of stupidity is not congenital but *induced*. People, in their simplicity, accept being stupid. The reason is not offered by the Christian pastor, but we can intuit it: because it is simpler. Stupidity is simpler, easier to bear, than the *burden of truly being free* through education and by compensating for the lack of intelligence through the accumulation of information.

Bonhoeffer doesn't hesitate to speak openly about this absence, which he sees as *a problem of the group*. Individual people are not as stupid as those who gather and form a collective. This point of the theologian's observation may seem contradictory in relation to his own work. "Life Together" represents one of the pastor's fundamental books dedicated to the benefits and importance of life lived in communion with those of the same faith and ideals, scattered like seeds just to spread the message of

⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 43.

Christianity's saving grace.⁸ However, when he says, "we note further that people who have isolated themselves from others or who live in solitude manifest this defect less frequently than individuals or groups of people inclined or condemned to sociability,"⁹ he is not referring so much to the community he envisioned with "Life Together," but rather highlights unity based on the absence of ethical principles. Bonhoeffer's community is one that remains united by faith; stupidity does not unite but only gathers. The difference is significant. As common beliefs bring us together and direct us towards a common goal, stupidity only gathers us in a similar dimension of narrow spaces, which does not evolve but, on the contrary, stagnates, lacking purpose and meaning. Stupidity does not lead because it has nowhere to go. Therefore, from another point of view, stupidity is a social defect, not congenital.¹⁰ Being a defect of society, it is assumed that society has the necessary tools to find solutions to this problem, but the solutions are the aim of a later part of this work. *Together*, for Bonhoeffer, does not necessarily imply a physical connection, but rather an ideological one. The image of scattered seeds is fundamental to the pastor's thinking. The defect of stupidity is manifested in physical interaction, whereas in solitude, it manifests itself less frequently. In this regard, there are studies¹¹ that demonstrate the fact that the majority opinion can exert an influence on the minority, an influence that can even lead to making decisions against their own convictions or beliefs. This power of influence of the majority, and even more so of stupidity, further proves Bonhoeffer's supposition that stupidity is a social defect.

Equally, stupidity serves as a *form of legitimization of power*; however, before delving into the development of this crucial point in Bonhoeffer's thinking on stupidity, we must first clarify some socio-political aspects related to legitimacy and power. Legitimization, it is worth mentioning marginally, refers to the accreditation of a certain type of behavior, the seeking of broad approval of a form of action that may have various

⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together/Prayerbook of the Bible*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesh and James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 28.

⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 43.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 43.

¹¹ Solomon E. Asch, "Effects of Group Pressure upon the Modification and Distortion of Judgments," in *Groups, Leadership and Men; Research in Human Relations*, ed. Harold Guetzkow (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Press, 1951), 177–90.

purposes, including obtaining or maintaining power.¹² Legitimization is necessary for any form of governance, whether despotic or democratic. Without it, power essentially lacks the necessary levers of action or influence. It has been rightly assumed that legitimization represents the primary goal of political discourse,¹³ as through broad legitimization, political actors manage to justify their political agenda and thus maintain or redirect the destiny of a nation or an entire region.¹⁴ Additionally, power is often understood as an asymmetric control relationship over valuable resources in the established relations within society.¹⁵ Therefore, power, in the terms this study seeks to elucidate, is understood only within a society and thus is a social power,¹⁶ which aims to achieve various goals across different levels of society. Therefore, it is quite clear that those who hold power also have a broad mastery over information and control its flow, thereby having the ability to manage the impressions others have of them, controlling their own legitimization. In this regard, maintaining power is associated with the dependence on stereotypes that contribute to the stagnation of the powerless in their place.¹⁷ With the help of these few clarifications regarding the necessity of power for legitimization, we can more easily understand the definition of stupidity as the legitimization of power that Bonhoeffer expresses in terms such as: “The power of the one needs the stupidity of the other.”¹⁸ This perspective is what will later shape the entire theory of stupidity formulated by the Protestant pastor. Only by understanding imbecility as a form of legitimizing political, and thus social, power can we understand the harmful consequences of it. Stupid people, gathered and suffering from a profound social defect, act in accordance with the desires of the powerful, and moreover, they

¹² Antonio Reyes, “Strategies of Legitimization in Political Discourse: From Words to Actions”, *Discourse & Society* 22, no. 6 (November 2011): 782.

¹³ Piotr Cap, “Towards the Proximity model of the Analysis of Legitimization in Political Discourse”, *Journal of Pragmatics* 40, no. 1 (January 2008): 39.

¹⁴ Reyes, “Strategies of Legitimization”, 783.

¹⁵ Joanneke van der Toorn and Matthew Feinberg, “A Sense of Powerlessness Fosters System Justification: Implications for the Legitimization of Authority, Hierarchy, and Government”, *Political Psychology* 20, no. 20 (2014): 2.

¹⁶ Susan T. Fiske and Jennifer Berdahl, “Social Power,” in *Social Psychology: A Handbook of Basic Principles*, eds. Arie W. Kruglanski and Edward T. Higgins (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 680.

¹⁷ van der Toorn and Feinberg, “A Sense of Powerlessness,” 2.

¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 43.

are tools in the hands of the powerful: “having thus become a mindless tool, the stupid person will also be capable of any evil and at the same time incapable of seeing that it is evil.”¹⁹ Power can decide not only the course of the nation but also the minds of those who submit with much imbecility. Political power, especially that concentrated in the hands of a despot/dictator, requires the stupidity of others. As we have observed, the context in which Bonhoeffer writes is marked by a totalitarian regime, and this fact determines his meditation on stupidity. To remain in power, the manifested power without any logic, which causes much harm and which, in a normal society, could not be tolerated, greatly needs as much stupidity as possible. We can assert, without error, that dictatorial power is directly proportional to the level of stupidity. The greater the stupidity, the more brutal the regime will be, and its actions will be more abominable! Bonhoeffer does not limit himself to specifying the deficient relationship of legitimization between stupidity and power but also provides additional explanations to assure us that this relationship is not based on academic preparation or lack of information, but: “upon closer observation, it becomes apparent that every strong upsurge of power in the public sphere, be it of a political or a religious nature, infects a large part of humankind with stupidity.”²⁰ Thus, the rise of power in the public or religious sphere infects people with stupidity, and this relationship is a socio psychological law in terms provided by Bonhoeffer. It is not academic preparation or lack thereof that determines stupidity but simply the impact that the increase in power capital, surprisingly, has on people that determines the degree of stupidity. The socio psychological law that Bonhoeffer speaks of structurally refers to the persuasion exerted by the rise of power over citizens. Without claiming exhaustiveness, however, it must be said that persuasion techniques, following various application models, lead to a unitary goal, changing attitudes in favor of a specific purpose.²¹ The problem of changing citizens’ attitudes and, in fact, legitimizing power through stupidity, arises when the political agenda presupposes actions that have a negative impact on society but are accepted through citizens’ stupidity.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 43.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ Gregory R. Maio and Geoffrey Haddock, “Attitude Change,” in *Social Psychology: A Handbook*, eds. Kruglanski and Higgins, 579.

Thus, we come to the central point of Bonhoeffer's theory of stupidity. If until now the definition of stupidity has focused on the consequences presented by the Protestant pastor, however, he offers a direct definition that constitutes the climax of his theory: "Stupidity is a more dangerous enemy of the good than malice."²² Stupidity is even more dangerous than evil and harder to combat. Evil, in Bonhoeffer's thinking, carries within itself the germ of subversion that produces discomfort in those who recognize it. More clearly, evil is more easily perceptible. The malicious person can be stopped because evil is exposed and thus halted, whereas in the face of stupidity, we are deprived of conventional defense. The stupid person is not aware of their own stupidity; in fact, they are self-satisfied. Arguments of reason and logic *fall on deaf ears* and produce no effect. Stupidity cannot be stopped from the harmful evil it produces; therefore, in the theologian's thinking, this is one of the most harmful states possible. This point of view, which also begins the pastor's meditation on stupidity, opens a wide horizon and, equally, a question as provocative as it is fundamental: If stupidity affects society in such a serious form, can we say that stupidity is a political evil?

Stupidity and political evil

We have seen that stupidity, in Bonhoeffer's thinking, can be defined as a sociological problem, a group deficiency that does not fall within the psychological or cognitive spectrum and through which power is legitimized, thus becoming one of the greatest *social evils*. In this sense, we cannot help but wonder if perhaps stupidity, in the form theorized by the Protestant theologian, is not a political evil, or at least if it is not a manifestation of this nefarious form of evil.

In approaching this perspective, we will attempt to define what political evil is and what its forms are, and then we will try to provide an answer regarding the compatibility between totalitarian evil and stupidity.

Evil takes on many distinct forms, many ways in which it manifests and brings calamity and disaster closer to us, but one of the most dire forms of evil, if we were to categorize evil and its manifestations, would undoubtedly be political evil. While personal evil affects only the soul of the individual who perpetrates it, political evil affects an entire nation, group, or society gratuitously, merely to achieve goals deemed

²² Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 43.

reasonable or considered reasonable by political leaders. This form is not a classical definition, and it is even more difficult to offer a standard definition of political evil. Some authors identify political evil with the violation of human rights, but such a similarity is too general and unspecific. Political evil could be defined as “the intentional, malevolent, and gratuitous destruction, suffering, or death inflicted upon innocent people by political leaders and states in their strategic efforts to achieve attainable objectives.”²³

Within the definition of political evil, we distinguish three fundamental aspects. Firstly, political evil is perpetrated by a political leader or by a state. It is thus a state policy, a regime, or a law. Political evil is not an act, an action, but a way of acting. The terminology of *politics* may be incomplete, but it conceals some important implications. Only a leader who holds political power can commit political evil by imposing it as state policy through his actions. Perhaps the most well-known example in this case is undoubtedly Hitler’s infamous extermination program. However, unfortunately, this is not the only example that can be offered as an illustration of what political evil entails. In addition to this aspect, political evil implies that it is exercised upon *innocent* people. It is certain that innocence can have many meanings and definitions; nevertheless, in the case of political evil, the innocence of the people upon whom it is exercised implies that they have not committed any act that would normally violate the state’s law and thus make them liable to civil or criminal punishment. Thus, we observe that political evil is also discriminatory. Because in the absence of clearly expressed conditions on how it is committed, the group of people is thus at the mercy of the head of the state who, at his discretion, can decide who lives/suffers or not. Lastly, the third characteristic to consider when discussing political evil is that of *strategic effort*. A strategic effort presupposes, above all, a plan that leads to the achievable objective pursued by political evil. Thus, political evil, unlike other types of evil, is organized evil, which follows a plan toward a very precise goal, but which most often is petty, personal, and does not aim for the common good, as any policy should that seeks to offer a benevolent space for citizens.

²³ Alan Wolfe, *Political Evil. What It Is and How to Combat It* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 11.

Not every evil manifested in the world is political evil.²⁴ Essentially, political evil represents that form of evil that aims to achieve a political goal or has a direct connection to the realization of a political aspiration, whether national or international. Specialists identify four types of political evil, which then branch out into subcategories: *terrorism*, *ethnic cleansing*, *racially, ethnically, or religiously motivated killings*, and finally, *counter-evil*, which involves inflicting unjustified suffering on those presumed to have inflicted suffering upon oneself.²⁵

Stupidity and radical evil

We thus observe that stupidity does not appear in the list of manifestations of political evil, although, as argued earlier, in Bonhoeffer's thinking, it represents one of the greatest evils. However, it must be clarified that the list of actions through which political evil manifests is not (and I firmly believe cannot be) exhaustive. Political evil can be encountered in any form that limits, obstructs, or eliminates citizens' rights and freedoms, any form that has a negative impact on society. The only necessary condition for it to be understood as political evil is that it is exercised by a leader who holds political power. Such a view, which touches upon the *banalities of evil*,²⁶ belongs to Hannah Arendt, a great theorist of totalitarianism, as well as of the political phenomenon and its implications. For Arendt, political evil does not stop at the four forms listed but has a broader spread, a more comprehensive definitional breadth. It is interesting to note that both the context of Bonhoeffer and that of Arendt are similar; both are affected by the nefarious actions of the Nazi regime, and consequently, their views, although different, share sufficiently important commonalities.²⁷ It is not the purpose of the present study to compile a

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 36.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 29–35.

²⁶ The concept of the *banality of evil* appears in the book Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: The Viking Press, 1964). According to Arendt's testimony, this concept is not intended to theorize on the nature of evil, but simply to note the facts that occurred during Eichmann's trial; it is thus a strictly factual view. Arendt is amazed by the fact that Eichmann does not have a diabolical character or a pathological psychology, but simply his flaw is thoughtlessness. The evil committed by Eichmann is banal, not because the evil was commonplace (the deeds were atrocious), but because the perpetrator was so ordinary, hence, banal.

²⁷ To see such a comparison: Charles T. Mathewes, "A Tale of Two Judgments: Bonhoeffer and Arendt on Evil, Understanding, and Limits, and the Limits of Understanding Evil," *The Journal of Religion* 80, No. 3 (Jul. 2000): 375–404; James Bernauer, "Bonhoeffer

list of these points, but rather to consider what evil means and, particularly, the consequences of stupidity.

The recipe for radical evil

For Arendt, the unprecedented atrocities committed by the Nazi regime are called *radical evil*,²⁸ with three stages to fulfill to truly be called radical or absolute. Before listing the three points of radical evil, it is important to mention that the term *radical*, synonymous with absolute, is based on Arendt's conception that this evil is so great because it is not based on any rational motive. It brings no benefit to society, the economy, or military power, and that is precisely why it is an absolute evil and, equally, the crimes it was capable of, which history had never encountered, made this new type of evil - *radical evil* - unable to be compared to anything prior. Its only foundation, in Arendt's thinking, is the totalitarian belief that anything is possible, but which demonstrates that everything can be destroyed. This belief, which created absolute evil, has turned humanity into something superfluous, without value and meaning.²⁹ Thus, the first step towards achieving absolute evil or, in Arendt's words, towards *absolute domination* is the *killing of legal personality*, that is, the removal of a person from the protection of the law and, equally, from the scope of the "right to have rights".³⁰ Deprivation of rights represents the sure path to total domination over an individual.³¹ The second stage in the *making of corpses* is the *killing of moral personality*. Eliminating the choice between good and evil and depriving one's own person of its individuality, by the extirpation of morality, represents a decisive step in total mastery over consciousness. Arendt expresses herself in extremely harsh terms regarding the choices that citizens had to make under Nazi totalitarianism; they

and Arendt at One Hundred," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 2, no. 1 (2007): 77–85; Shinkyu Lee, "The Political vs. the Theological: The Scope of Secularity in Arendtian Forgiveness," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 50, no. 4 (2022): 670–95.

²⁸ In this study, we will focus exclusively on Hannah Arendt's conception of *radical evil*, even though she draws inspiration from Kant's perspective. Nevertheless, what is relevant in the current discussion is how Arendt is inspired to develop a theory of evil because of the horrifying actions perpetrated by the Nazi regime. These atrocities also led Bonhoeffer to reflect on the nature of stupidity.

²⁹ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1962), 459.

³⁰ Paul Formosa, "Is Radical Evil Banal? Is Banal Evil Radical?," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 33, no. 6 (2007): 718.

³¹ Arendt, *The Origins*, 447–51.

were not faced with a balance between good and evil, but between crime and crime. Moreover, concentration camps turned death into an anonymous event, stripping it of personal significance and thereby demonstrating that, in reality, individuals never possessed anything of their own, not even their own selves. Martyrdom itself became impossible in the extermination camps because, as Hannah notes, once there is no more human solidarity, corrupted by ideology,³² thousands of people living in absolute loneliness, then the gesture of death for a noble purpose becomes useless, and this is the great success of totalitarianism.³³ The third and final stage (precisely because of its gravity) in achieving the monstrous goal of the unprecedented evil is the *transformation of the person into a superfluous entity through the destruction of individuality and spontaneity, and consequently, of any human trace of solidarity and freedom*,³⁴ Spontaneity and individuality make the human person human, imbuing it with value and meaning; in the absence of these essential elements of human existence, man becomes merely a bundle of changeable reactions at any time with any other bundle of reactions,³⁵ and the human person thus becomes superfluous – this being the purpose of the entire inhuman treatment of radical evil. However, the most difficult question regarding the absolute evil developed by totalitarian regimes is not about its definition but about the reason for its exercise. To this question, Arendt provides an unimaginable answer: the only reason totalitarian regimes choose to exercise their power through radical evil is because they desire their ideology to be entirely coherent. The totalitarian ideology, which relies on reshaping the past and precise planning of the future, cannot handle the creativity and spontaneity of the human being capable of thwarting its plans. Therefore, the solution is to eliminate any trace of what can be called human.³⁶ Power is the binding key. Ideology and power are thus the key concepts of totalitarianism as defined by Arendt. An ideology that seeks to eliminate humanity by reducing it to a mere string of reactions and pre-established slogans thus arrives at Bonhoeffer's definition.

³² Richard Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 210.

³³ Arendt, *The Origins*, 451–53.

³⁴ Bernstein, *Radical Evil*, 211.

³⁵ Arendt, *The Origins*, 456.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 458.

A connection?

Even though it might seem like we have veered away from the theory of stupidity, the radical evil discussed by Arendt would not be possible without the stupidity theorized by Bonhoeffer. Arendt presents the fact that the *factories of corpses* would not be possible without an intelligible, *previous preparation*, both historically and politically, of the *living corpses*,³⁷ of *ghastly marionettes with human faces*.³⁸ It's the same image used by the Protestant pastor when presenting a relationship with the stupid person:

In conversation with him, one virtually feels that one is dealing not at all with him as a person, but with slogans, catchwords, and the like that have taken possession of him. He is under a spell, blinded, misused, and abused in his very being. Having thus become a mindless tool, the stupid person will also be capable of any evil and at the same time incapable of seeing that it is evil.³⁹

Depersonalization and the superfluity of the human person are the points of connection between radical evil and stupidity.

However, this does not imply, at first glance, that stupidity is a radical evil or, at least, a political one, but rather that it is a consequence of such actions. This surface view is not entirely wrong, but it is incomplete. Analyzing the two perspectives, that of absolute evil and that of stupidity, we can observe the relationship between them under a sociological framework: radical evil makes people stupid, and stupidity legitimizes political evil – considering that not every form of political evil is radical evil; but every radical evil is political evil. The explanation lies in the person who commits the evil, whether it be political or totalitarian, because only a political leader, by virtue of the power they hold, is capable of manifesting the horrifying actions of radical evil. This makes it a political evil, as the perpetrator possesses political power and acts according to a strategy with a specific objective against innocent people. Only a political totalitarian leader is capable, by virtue of the power he holds, of manifesting the horrifying actions of radical evil, thus being a political evil; however, not every political evil – terrorism, ethnic cleansing, killing based on race, ethnicity, or religion, or counter-evil – leads to depersonalization of the human being and, consequently, is not a radical evil. But, nevertheless,

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 447.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, 455.

³⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 44.

it is extremely important to make a conceptual distinction. We have observed that power always needs legitimization from society. Such legitimization of a power that acts on one hand, either through radical evil or through political evil, could not exist without stupid people. Here is the key to the whole argumentation. Stupidity is at the core of both concepts of evil. Even though we have mentioned that radical evil makes people stupid, Arendt also acknowledges a premeditated preparation for this evil and, therefore, a stupidization preceding manifestation of evil. In this sense, for evil to be absolute or political evil, it needs stupidity, which, in Bonhoeffer's theory, is the greatest evil, and we can understand why.

Is there any way out?

Stupidity is an evil, and for Bonhoeffer, the stupid person is the greatest evil that can happen to a society, and throughout the argumentation, we have observed how stupidity underlies manifestations of radical evil so extreme that history could not relate to any precedent precisely because of their unprecedented atrocity. Nevertheless, from the outset of this study, there has always been a sense of hope. There must still be a way out of the dire trap of stupidity and the evil it produces. Stupidity, like evil, cannot be eternal and, implicitly, infinite. There is surely an exit, a window through which the happy dawn of an educated world can be glimpsed, liberated from the tyranny of the stupid. The totalitarianism of stupidity can only be stopped through inner liberation, by freeing oneself from the terrifying chains of imbecility. Bonhoeffer offers two extremely important plans to find the way to limit and even stop stupidity. Imbecility can only be stopped through an act of liberation, not through academic instruction. However, this act of inner liberation must be preceded by an act of outer liberation, which ultimately is supported and implemented only by political decision-makers, who must desire the inner wisdom and independence of citizens more than their stupidity. We are once again facing a sociological relationship of great importance that implies steps toward eliminating stupidity: political decision-makers must desire the independence and wisdom of the population and provide external liberation, which will lead to the act of inner liberation and thus escape from the yoke of imbecility.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 44.

Although it may seem simplistic, this relationship is the only one that can help the world, in the perspective of the Protestant pastor. Without these steps, any other attempt will not be successful. However, this path proposed by Bonhoeffer contains an element that subsequently regulates the entire social construct: the desire of political decision-makers. This desire of decision-makers should not be directed towards the total domination of the population, but towards its independence, towards respecting rights, and towards the responsible freedom assumed by citizens. It is known that political beliefs differentiate individuals and groups in accordance with ideological orientations and political preferences,⁴¹ which implicitly means that only a regime that assumes principles such as freedom, citizen rights, and independence can support the act of inner liberation of citizens and thus stop the greatest evil of society – stupidity.

The World's coming of age⁴² and the seeds of education - a life together for the better

In the letters sent from prison, Bonhoeffer spoke about the world reaching maturity and how this world rejects God. His eschatological vision, strongly influenced by his context, remains valid today. The world no longer feels the need for God and rejects His work. However, not all is lost. Christianity, which for the Protestant pastor undergoes a reconceptualization, is what can save this world from self-destruction. Christians are scattered like seeds in an unbelieving world, carrying with them the message of salvation, bearing the seeds of the kingdom of God.⁴³ This physical separation is not, however, an ideological separation. Christians are united by faith, by grace, by the Word of God; they are united in Christ,⁴⁴ and through this dispersion among unbelievers, they find their mission and work.⁴⁵

But for our theme, the image Bonhoeffer represents for the burden of freedom is significant. All people are free, and the unbelievers, in their freedom, must be respected for the choices they make. Christians,

⁴¹ Christian Staerklé, "Political Psychology," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*. Second Edition, ed. James D. Wright (Elsevier, 2015), 429.

⁴² The theme of the world's *coming of age*, is developed by Bonhoeffer in his later works, see for example, Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 478–79.

⁴³ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 5.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 81.

respecting the freedom of others, bear an immense burden – *the burden of freedom*,⁴⁶ which presupposes, above all, seeing in those around you the image of the Creator, to whose service Christians have been called, that of bearing the joyful message of salvation.

This vision, connected with the theory of stupidity, helps us to outline a picture of solutions, not so much of premises. Stupidity, as we have observed, is the greatest evil a society can endure, because it can legitimize political power capable of radical or political evil. However, the solution, the healing of this society, is a life lived together by and with Christians who, through their message full of *spiritual love*, can bring liberation from the tyranny of stupidity.

This communion of Christians in Christ alone⁴⁷ is distinct from the assembly that stupidity presupposes. In the words of Cipolla, who theorized the five fundamental laws of stupidity,⁴⁸ the unequal distinction numerically is between imbeciles and non-imbeciles. The number of imbeciles is always underestimated (law 1); they will always act to the detriment of others without having anything to gain, even suffering losses themselves (law 3). Those who do not suffer from imbecility will underestimate the harmful influence exerted by an imbecile (law 4), and therefore, the stupid person is worse than a malefactor (law 5).⁴⁹ We see that there is a certain similarity between Bonhoeffer's theory and the laws proposed by Cipolla, but there are significant differences, especially in terms of concept. For Cipolla, the imbecile/non-imbecile ratio is an economic one, based on the harm-gain relationship; Cipolla's entire vision is an economic one (he himself being an economist), while Bonhoeffer seeks the roots of the problem. For Bonhoeffer, stupidity is an evil in the deepest sense of the term, and the profit/loss ratios are not of great importance to the Protestant pastor if society suffers at its deepest levels due

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 78.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 81.

⁴⁸ For an overview of the statistics of the behavioral implications of the fundamental laws of stupidity proposed by Cipolla, we recommend: Donny R. Bárcenas, Joel Kuperman and Marcelo N. Kuperman, "The Destructive Effect of Human Stupidity: A Revision of Cipolla's Fundamental Laws," *The European Physical Journal B* 93, no. 211 (2020); Ilaria Perissi and Ugo Bardi, "The Sixth Law of Stupidity: A Biophysical Interpretation of Carlo Cipolla's Stupidity Laws," *Systems* 9, no. 3 (2021); Piero Mella, "Intelligence and Stupidity –The Educational Power of Cipolla's Test and of the Social Wheel" *Creative Education* 8, (2017): 2515–34.

⁴⁹ Carlo M. Cipolla, *The Basic Laws of Human Stupidity* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2011).

to stupidity. Therefore, unlike Cipolla's economic vision, the perspective offered by Hannah Arendt is closer to Bonhoeffer. Stupidity is an evil, legitimizes evil, and is a powerful tool in the hands of tyrants; hence, we need acts of inner liberation to open our horizon to the realities of the world and to see the lights of goodness.

Instead of conclusion

Stupidity is not a subject to be quickly disposed of. Unfortunately, it is vast and difficult to cover in a few words. Bonhoeffer's theory of stupidity enjoys a significant advantage. It theorizes about stupidity without defining its boundaries. Anyone can fall under the incidence of stupidity, but for Bonhoeffer, it's not so much the nature of stupidity that impresses, but rather its dire effects. Stupid people are capable of evil that they themselves cannot even comprehend. Through their docility and lack of spontaneity, they legitimize political evil. Indeed, as we have observed, stupid people undergo preparation in this regard. They are dehumanized, devoid of legal personality, morality, and ultimately of their inner freedom, and these stages lead to the legitimization of actions that surpass the understanding even of those who, in their utter stupidity, give their consent.

Bonhoeffer's context is defining for his theory, yet we observe that it remains highly relevant today. Even though in democratic countries there are no longer actions from the spectrum of *radical evil* as defined by Hannah Arendt, we still see remnants of totalitarian regimes that have left mentalities, programs, and institutions – true schools for the formation of *stupid consciences* – in their wake. Only the inner liberation of citizens preceded by an external liberation (which seems to be enjoyed today) can be the solution. Stupidity affects society, and as long as *schools of stupidity* exist, the world will not be a better place. True *universities of freedom* are needed where the discipline of inner responsibility can be learned. *Education liberates* from the yoke of programs that stifle spontaneity and forms spirits that judge the signs of the times personally and with universal impact. These are just a few of the solutions we can find to the problem of stupidity as theorized by Bonhoeffer.

Christ said: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8.32). This truth of freedom preached by Jesus himself is the solution. If we do not take responsibility for our own freedom and legitimize others to decide for us, the fate of stupidity will always be a

prosperous one. However, if we go through the difficult but not impossible process of finding the truth that will set us free, we will be able *to sing*, without remorse, *the requiem of stupidity*.

Die Differenz im Einssein Notizen zur arendtschen „Banalität des Bösen“

EVELINE CIOFLEC*

This paper takes up the controversial arendtian term “banality of evil” and shows how plurality rooted in non-indifference is necessary for preventing us from acting bad. Distinct from “radical Evil” the “Banality of Evil” is not in itself banal. Evil deeds sneak into everyday life if being-one with oneself by consulting with oneself on the actions to be taken is missing. Hence, being-one presupposes plurality for the inner dialogue. As a matter of fact, plurality is rooted in the natality of human beings, in being born as being separated and differentiated from others. Nevertheless, conscious plurality as active non-indifference in thought and judgment is yet necessary.

Keywords: *Banality of Evil, Oneness, Non-Indifference, Hannah Arendt, Two-in-One, Plurality*

Mehr noch als das Böse stehen für Hannah Arendt die Übeltäter im Mittelpunkt ihrer Ausführungen. Arendt beschäftigt weniger die systematische Frage, ob es das Böse gibt und was dieses sei, sondern vielmehr die Frage, wieso, d.h. wie es dazu kommt, dass Menschen Böses tun. Ihre bekannte Wendung „Banalität des Bösen“ ist nur dann aussagekräftig, wenn sie den Bereich menschlichen Handelns betrifft. Das heißt, das Böse wird als Unrecht tun, verletzen, anderen Schaden zufügen usw. aufgefasst. Diese Auffassung bleibt zwangsläufig nur ein „Ausgangspunkt“, wenn der Frage nach dem Bösen schlechthin, sofern diese gestellt werden kann, nachgegangen werden soll, wie Schäfer dieses formuliert:

Ausgangspunkt ist in fast allen Fällen die Frage nach dem Bösen im menschlichen Verfügungsbereich, d.h. im moralischen Handeln. Von hier wird zumeist, nämlich in den Fällen, in denen nicht bei der Moral verblieben wird, die weiterführende Erklärung des Bösen angegangen.¹

In diesem Beitrag werde ich den zweiten Schritt nicht mitgehen, d.h. keine ontologische Untersuchung zum Bösen ansteuern. Das heißt, es geht nicht um das Böse schlechthin, das in dieser objektivierenden

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¹ Christian Schäfer, „Einführung,“ in *Was ist das Böse? Philosophische Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Hrg. Christian Schäfer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2014), 7–25, 18.

Weise wohl unzugänglich bleibt, und doch immer nur in der Weise der Verneinung, der Vernichtung angegangen werden kann. Das Böse schlechthin entzieht sich uns, entzieht sich dem Verstand, und doch verstehen wir, was böse Taten sind.

Arendt sucht nach Möglichkeiten der Vermeidung des Bösen im Tun. Dabei geht es ihr um zwei Schritte: zunächst darum, Zwei-in-Eins sein zu können, das heißt, mit sich selbst zu Rate gehen zu können. In einem zweiten Schritt geht es darum, dass für dieses Zwei-in-Eins eine Stimmigkeit gegeben ist, die das Einssein mit sich selbst in jeder Handlung benötigt, und zwar so, dass man für das Tun Verantwortung übernehmen kann.

So einfach diese zwei Schritte auch zu sein scheinen, umso schwieriger sind sie nachzuvollziehen, wenn genauer betrachtet wird, wer die „zwei“ in Einem sind. Noch schwieriger wird die Lage, wenn augenfällig wird, dass Zwei zu sein gerade Integrität voraussetzt. Nicht das Einssein, das jeder von uns vor anderen ist, wenn man eben als eine oder einer gesehen wird, sozusagen das scheinbare, sondern das Einssein, durch den inneren Dialog hindurch, das Einssein *als* Zwei-in-Eins, erst dieses macht uns zu verantwortlich Handelnden. Das Einssein, das im Zentrum der arendtschen Überlegungen zur Moralität steht, birgt in sich eine Differenz, wobei letztere den Kern der Pluralität ausmacht.

Die „Banalität des Bösen“ besteht bei Arendt gerade darin, nicht bei sich zu sein, sich selbst preiszugeben, anderen das Vorrecht geben, die eigenen Handlungen zu bestimmen. „Von-sich-selbst-verlassen-Sein“ nennt Arendt die „zeitweise Unfähigkeit, sozusagen Zwei-in-Einem zu werden“, ² eine Unfähigkeit, die zu unbedachtem Handeln führt. In diesem Kontext ist das Böse nicht radikal, nicht verwurzelt, sondern ist vielmehr als eine Abwesenheit des Guten aufzufassen, wobei das Gute im freien und selbstbestimmten Handeln des Einzelnen verankert wäre. Der Mensch kann nicht zugleich frei und böse sein, diesem stimmt Arendt auf den Spuren Kants zu. Zumal aber Freiheit die wichtigste Bestimmung des Menschen ist, muss im Falle des Menschen das radikal Böse ausbleiben. Wenn letzteres doch noch verzeichnet wird, dann als das, was „nicht hätte geschehen dürfen“. ³

² Hannah Arendt, *Über das Böse. Eine Vorlesung zu Fragen der Ethik* (München, Zürich: Piper, 2008), 79.

³ *Ibidem*, 44. Mit „dies hätte nicht geschehen dürfen“ meint Arendt die „Fabrikation der Leichen“ im NS-Regime. Vgl. auch idem, „Fernsehgespräch mit Günter Gaus“

Im Weiteren greife ich die Wendung der „Banalität des Bösen“ als entgegengesetzt dem „radikal Bösen“ auf, um als nächstes das „Einssein“ bzw. „Eins-Sein“ als das Böse im Handeln Verhindernde hervorzuheben und abrundend auf die Tragweite der Pluralität des Selbst, die im Eins-Sein vorausgesetzt wird, einzugehen, und diese in der Natalität sowie der eigens ergriffenen Nicht-Indifferenz im Denken zu verorten.

Zur Banalität des Bösen

Der Ausdruck „Banalität des Bösen“ will das Böse keinesfalls trivialisieren. Vielmehr ist der Ausdruck als Gegenbegriff zum „radikal Bösen“ zu verstehen. Letzterer ist von Kant geprägt worden, in seiner Schrift *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* aus dem Jahr 1793, in der ein Vermittlungsprogramm zwischen Religions- und Kirchenglaube entworfen wird, indem die Moralthorie der *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* auf die Hauptlehren der christlichen Religion projiziert wird.⁴

Bei Kant ist das „radikal Böse“ in der Natur des Menschen verwurzelt, nämlich darin, dass der Mensch Neigungen und Versuchungen unterliegen kann, und somit nicht mehr der Vernunft folgt, die durchaus im Bereich der Tugenden Recht von Unrecht zu trennen weiß. Die Versuchungen jedoch lenken ab, so dass man nicht mehr „seiner Vernunft und seinem Herzen“ folgt.⁵ Niemand will böse sein und der Gedanke der Versuchungen lässt ebenso den Gedanken des sich Einschleichens des Bösen entstehen. Radikal bleibt dabei die Verwurzelung in der menschlichen Natur.

Arendt vertritt zunächst auch die Auffassung einer Radikalität des Bösen, insbesondere in ihrer bekannten Schrift *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, auf Amerikanisch 1951 erschienen, wo sie der Ansicht ist, dass gewisse Taten „radikal böse“ sind, und Menschen, die dazu fähig sind, „dämonisch“ oder „monströs“ sein müssten.⁶

(1964),“ in Arendt, *Ich will verstehen. Selbstauskünfte zu Leben und Werk* (München, Zürich: Piper, 2007), 46–72, 61.

⁴ Vgl. auch Claudia Bozzaro, *Hannah Arendt und die Banalität des Bösen. Mit einem Vorwort von Lore Hühn* (Freiburg: Fördergemeinschaft wissenschaftlicher Publikationen von Frauen, 2007), 22; vgl. auch Eveline Cioflec, „Verstehen und Handeln. Ein Ansatz mit Martin Heidegger und Hannah Arendt,“ in *New Europe College Yearbook* 2008–2009, Bukarest, 21–46, 38.

⁵ Arendt, *Über das Böse*, 27.

⁶ Idem, *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft. Antisemitismus, Imperialismus, totale Herrschaft* (München, Zürich: Piper, 2008).

Arendt selbst fasst das radikal Böse doch ganz anders auf, nämlich so, dass es unergründlich ist. Mehr noch, es stellt den Menschen als Menschen in Frage, ist in gewissem Sinne unvereinbar mit dem Menschsein, zumal dafür keine Verantwortung übernommen werden kann:

Das radikal Böse ist das, was nicht hätte passieren dürfen, das heißt das, womit man sich nicht versöhnen kann, was man als Schickung unter keinen Umständen akzeptieren kann, und das, woran man auch nicht schweigend vorübergehen darf. Es ist das, wofür man die Verantwortung nicht übernehmen kann, weil seine Folgerungen unabsehbar sind und weil es unter diesen Folgerungen keine Strafe gibt, die adäquat wäre. Das heißt nicht, dass jedes Böse bestraft werden muss, aber es muss, soll man sich versöhnen oder von ihm abwenden können, bestrafbar sein.⁷

Das radikal Böse meint bei Arendt nicht das in der menschlichen Natur verankerte, sondern dasjenige, das jenes zerstört, was als „Wurzeln“ der Menschlichkeit verstanden werden kann:

Das Böse, das durch die totale Herrschaft heraufbeschworen wurde, ist für Arendt ein „radikal Böses“. Es ist „radikal“, weil es nicht nur auf die physische und die psychische Zerstörung eines Individuums, sondern auf die Idee selbst des Individuums, sozusagen seine metaphysische Ausschaltung, die Opfer und Täter gleichsam umfasst. Das „radikal Böse“ visiert die Vernichtung der menschlichen „Spontaneität“ und Pluralität an, welche nach Hannah Arendt die „Wurzeln“ der Menschlichkeit konstituieren. Dieses von der totalen Herrschaft bewirkte „radikal Böse“ stellt ein „Noch-Nie-Dagewesenes“ in der Geschichte dar.⁸

Andernorts nennt Arendt dasjenige Böse, für das keine Verantwortung übernommen werden kann, das größte begangene Böse: „Das größte begangene Böse ist das Böse, das von Niemandem getan wurde, das heißt, von menschlichen Wesen, die sich weigern, Personen zu sein.“⁹ Somit ist der Ausdruck „Banalität des Bösen“ nicht selbst wiederum banal, sondern kennzeichnet „das größte Böse“: „Das größte Böse ist nicht radikal, es hat keine Wurzeln, und weil es keine Wurzeln hat, hat es keine Grenzen, kann sich ins Unvorstellbare entwickeln und über die ganze Welt ausbreiten.“¹⁰

⁷ Arendt, *Denktagebuch 1950–1973*, Bd. 1. (München, Zürich: Piper, 2016), 7.

⁸ Bozzaro, *Hannah Arendt*, 99.

⁹ Arendt, *Über das Böse*, 101.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 77.

Der Begriff der „Banalität des Bösen“ wurde bekannt durch Arendts Bericht zum Gerichtsverfahren 1961 in Jerusalem gegen den Naziverbrecher Adolf Eichmann, der den umstrittenen Untertitel trägt „Ein Bericht zur Banalität des Bösen“.¹¹ Als Arendt dem Eichmann-Prozess beisitzt, wird sie davon überrascht, dass einer der größten Verbrecher des Nazi-Regimes gerade nicht als „dämonisch“ oder „monströs“ erscheint, was sie entsprechend ihrer Auffassung zum Bösen erwartet hätte. Dass aber die Taten zweifelsohne böse waren, lässt sie eine andere Schlussfolgerung bezüglich des Bösen ziehen, nämlich, dass es sich bei jeder und jedem einschleichen kann, und es somit gerade nicht radikal, sondern banal ist.¹²

Das Beunruhigende an der Person Eichmanns war doch gerade, daß er war wie viele und daß diese vielen weder pervers noch sadistisch, sondern schrecklich und erschreckend normal sind. Vom Standpunkt unserer Rechtsinstitutionen und an unseren moralischen Urteilsmaßstäben gemessen, war diese Normalität viel erschreckender als all die Gräueltaten zusammengenommen, denn sie implizierte – wie man zur Genüge aus den Aussagen der Nürnberger Angeklagten und ihrer Verteidiger wußte –, daß dieser neue Verbrechertypus, der nun wirklich *hostis generis humani* ist, unter Bedingungen handelt, die es ihm beinahe unmöglich machen, sich seiner Untaten bewußt zu werden.¹³

Für Arendt ist das Erschreckende, dass einer der größten Verbrecher der Menschheitsgeschichte wie ein gewöhnlicher Mensch aussieht und sogar nicht bewusst ist, was er tut.¹⁴ Das Böse sticht nicht hervor, es bleibt verdeckt in der Normalität, so dass es überall vermutet werden könnte.

¹¹ Idem, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. Ein Bericht von der Banalität des Bösen* (München, Zürich: Piper, 2008). Zur Kontroverse siehe Arendt, *Denken ohne Geländer* (München, Zürich: Piper, 2008), 169–73; zur Aktualität der Kontroverse vgl. Lutz Fiedler, „Eichmann in Jerusalem wiedergelesen. Hannah Arendt über jüdische Politik und internationale Strafgerichtsbarkeit nach dem Holocaust,“ *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 75, Nr. 3 (Juli 2023).

¹² Vgl. auch Luke Russel, *Das Böse. Eine philosophische Spurensuche*, übers. Michael Müller (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2023), 81–4.

¹³ Arendt, *Denken ohne Geländer*, 165; Idem, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 400.

¹⁴ Dass Arendt Eichmann nicht ganz richtig einschätzt und letzterer nicht nur gedankenlos, sondern doch aus Überzeugung gehandelt hatte – für Belege vgl. Russel, *Das Böse. Eine philosophische Spurensuche* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2023), 87 – ändert nicht viel an seinem Auftreten als Bürokrat, und noch weniger an der Analyse des Bösen ausgehend von der Normalität.

Die Banalität des Bösen meint, dass das Böse als unumgänglich und unbegreifbar allgegenwärtig ist, in größerem oder kleinerem Maß. Dieses greift mit Bezug auf Arendt auch Arnd Pollmann in seinem bereits in zweiter Auflage erschienenen Handbuch zur „Unmoral“ auf, wenn er feststellt, dass man „weder Theologie noch Metaphysik“ braucht „um es zu verstehen“.¹⁵ Der so gefasste Begriff des Bösen erwächst, so Pollmann, „allein dem Wissen um das, was *Menschen* einander antun können“. Dabei gilt, dass die „Proklamation dunkler Mächte“ im Grunde dazu dient, zu „verschleiern, wozu der Mensch – und zwar prinzipiell *jeder* Mensch – fähig ist“.¹⁶ Die Banalität ergibt sich gerade daraus, dass ihr Handeln, wenn auch grauenhaft, so doch erklärbar ist, begreiflich gemacht werden kann. Der Aspekt der Banalität reicht jedoch weiter, zumal das Böse sich als „erschreckende Normalität“ gestalten kann.¹⁷

Wenn Besinnung, Zwiegespräch vor dem Einschleichen des Bösen bewahren könnte, so erschreckt gerade der Verdacht, dass man selbst oder eben jede und jeder in schwierigen Umständen zum Täter werden könnte. Gerade in schwierigen Zeiten, oder mit Arendt gesagt in „finsternen Zeiten“¹⁸, dürfte oft die Muße fehlen, mit sich selber zu Rate zu gehen. Wie Franziska Augstein bemerkt:

Das große Geheimnis ist nicht das Böse. Nein, es ist die Frage, warum es noch unter den schlimmsten Umständen immer einzelne gibt, die sich nicht bloß dem Mittun verweigern, sondern Leib und Leben aufs Spiel setzen für Zwecke und Ideen, die wir summarisch „das Gute“ nennen.¹⁹

Die Pluralität des Selbst

Das „Einssein“ im Zwiegespräch mit sich selbst klingt zunächst nach Selbstidentität, nach abgerundeter Einheitlichkeit. Arendt geht es aber gerade nicht um das Sein, sondern um eine Stimmigkeit, eine Übereinstimmung zwischen dem, was man tut, mit dem, was man denkt bzw. urteilt, ganz im Sinne dessen wie Charles Taylor hervorhebt: „Das

¹⁵ Arnd Pollmann, *Ein philosophisches Handbuch. Von Ausbeutung bis Zwang* (München: C. H. Beck, 2022), 43.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ Arendt, *Denken ohne Geländer*, 165.

¹⁸ Idem, *Menschen in finsternen Zeiten*, Hrg. Ursula Lutz (München: Piper, 2012), 9.

¹⁹ Franziska Augstein, „Taten und Täter. Ein Nachwort,“ in Arendt, *Über das Böse*, 177–95.

Selbst und das Gute oder, anders gesagt, das Selbst und die Moral sind Themen, die sich als unentwirrbar miteinander verflochten erweisen.²⁰

Noch einfacher gesagt, es geht Arendt darum, nicht kopflos zu handeln, und schon gar nicht gegen oder trotz der eigenen Auffassung ein anderes zu tun, sei es aus Bequemlichkeit oder, noch schlimmer, im Bann anderer. So heißt es: „Es ist besser, mit der ganzen Welt uneins zu sein, als mit mir selbst uneins zu sein.“²¹

So schlicht die genannte Wendung auch klingen mag, so selbstverständlich, sie drängt sich gerade durch die Irritation ihrer Selbstverständlichkeit in den Vordergrund. Denn gerade was so einfach klingt, ist, bei genauerem Hinsehen, gar nicht so einfach. Zwiespältigkeit, Selbstvergessenheit, Unbedachtheit, Verkopftheit und so weiter, eine endlos lange Reihe von Möglichkeiten gerade nicht wirklich mit sich Eins zu sein, scheint eher unsere Alltagserfahrungen im Tun und Lassen zu beschreiben. Dennoch ist Arendts Anspruch nicht unbedingt eine tiefe Selbstbesinnung, sondern vielmehr schlicht eine gewisse Überprüfung der eigenen Handlungen. Das eigene Urteil über eine Handlungssituation ist gefragt, so dass man nicht unüberlegt handelt.

Im Grunde scheint das altklug zu sein, und dieser Bezug des Handelns zur Vernunft, zum eigenen Urteilen fast schon abgedroschen und irritierend. In einer Zeit, in der die Lebenshaltung „go with the flow“²² eher angesagt ist, oder eben der Weg des geringsten Widerstandes, vielleicht gerade weil das Vertrauen auf die allgemeingültige und gesetzgebende Vernunft der Aufklärung durchaus gebrochen ist,²³ dürfte dieser Aufruf nicht mehr ohne Weiteres angenommen werden. Aber gerade dieser Skeptizismus lässt Arendts Wendung so aktuell bleiben, denn wie man mit sich selbst Eins ist, das dürfte offenbleiben. Es liegt zwar nahe, bei der angespielten Besinnung an Reflexion zu denken und diese mit der Vernunft zu verknüpfen. Arendt beteuert ja auch „stop and think“.²⁴

²⁰ Charles Taylor, *Quellen des Selbst. Die Entstehung der neuzeitlichen Identität* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1996), 7.

²¹ Arendt, *Über das Böse*, 91.

²² Diese Redewendung wird hier plakativ, im Sinne der Lebenseinstellung der Freiheitsbewegungen der 1960-er Jahre in den USA und Europa verwendet, der sogenannten Hippie-Bewegung, die derzeit, als Einstellung, wieder aktuell wird.

²³ Max Horkheimer und Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2001). Vgl. auch Cioflec, „Aufklärung und Interkulturalität“, *Studia UBB. Philosophia* 57, Nr. 3 (2012): 59–78.

²⁴ Arendt, *Über das Böse*, 92.

Nun kommt es aber darauf an, im Näheren zu betrachten, was hier mit „think“, also mit Denken gemeint ist. Denken ist zunächst nicht Urteilen, und doch besteht ein enger Zusammenhang, der in diesem Kontext insofern von Belang ist, als die Frage nach dem Bösen bei Arendt die Nichtverallgemeinerung zum Grundsatz macht, nämlich so, dass gerade die Rücksicht auf das Spezifische der einzelnen Situation und die individuelle Besinnung erst dazu führen können, das Böse in seiner Banalität zu vermeiden.

Wie das Urteilen zur Sprache kommt, kann hier nur angedeutet werden: Das Handeln in einer gewissen Situation, dem ja gerade die Besinnung vorangehen soll, setzt das Urteilen voraus, wobei die Handlungssituation zwangsläufig aus Einzeldingen besteht, die nicht dem Allgemeinen subsumierbar sind. Dieser Schwierigkeit, dass die einzelne Situation nicht verallgemeinert werden kann, wirkt Arendt entgegen, indem sie das Urteilen vom ästhetischen Urteil ableitet, das doxastisch vor sich geht und somit die Möglichkeit mit sich bringt, das Partikulare zu berücksichtigen, das heißt, diese eine Situation in den Blick zu nehmen.²⁵ D.h. wie die eine Situation, in der ich handle, eingeschätzt wird, ist nicht vorgegeben. Dass sie aber irgendwie eingeschätzt wird, dass dazu eine Stellung in irgendeiner Form bezogen wird und nicht blindlings gehandelt wird, darauf kommt es an. Hierfür ist das Selbstgespräch, so Arendt, unumgänglich, das Gespräch, das man mit sich selber führt. Die Stimmigkeit oder Übereinstimmung mit sich selbst, meint durchaus, dass man nicht mit sich selbst im Krieg ist, dass man mit sich selbst befreundet ist.²⁶

Hierzu ist aber zunächst zu klären, dass das gemeinte Denken Zweien-in-Einem voraussetzt. D.h., man geht mit sich selbst zu Rate. Wer ist derjenige, mit der man zu Rate geht? Es wird eine Differenz vorausgesetzt, nämlich eine Differenz zwischen ich und mir, oder zwischen ich und mich: „Wenn ich erscheine und von anderen gesehen werde, bin ich gewiß Einer; sonst könnte man mich gar nicht erkennen. Und solange ich mit anderen zusammen und kaum meiner selbst bewußt bin, bin ich so, wie ich den anderen erscheine.“²⁷ Diese Einheitlichkeit, die vor Anderen

²⁵ Für Näheres zur Herleitung des Urteils bei Arendt vom ästhetischen Urteil vgl. Cioflec, „Hermeneutic Responsibility in Political Judgement. Retrieving Factual Truth From Direct Interaction,“ *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Philosophia* 67, Nr. 3 (2022): 113–34.

²⁶ Arendt, *Vom Leben des Geistes. Das Denken. Das Wollen* (München, Zürich: Piper, 2008), 187.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 182.

oder im Umfeld anderer gegeben ist, wird im Alleinsein aufgebrochen, indem man zugleich auch für sich selbst ist: „[I]ch bin nicht nur für andere, sondern auch für mich, und in dieser Beziehung bin ich offenbar nicht bloß Einer. In mein Einssein hat sich ein Unterschied eingeschlichen.“²⁸

Spätestens in dieser Differenz einer Dualität des Ich, die aus der Perspektive des Bewusstseins angeführt wird, als „menschliche Verwirklichung des Bewußtseins im denkenden Zwiegespräch mit sich selbst“,²⁹ liegt dann auch die Offenheit für Pluralität begründet.³⁰

Aber vom Standpunkt der menschlichen Pluralität aus gesehen ist dieses Zwei-in-Einem gerade mal eine Spur von In-Gesellschaft-Sein – auch wenn ich für mich selbst *Einer* bin, bin ich Zwei oder kann Zwei werden –, die nur deshalb so ungeheuer wichtig wird, weil wir Pluralität entdecken, / wo wir sie am wenigsten erwartet hätten. Was jedoch das Mit-Anderen-Zusammen angeht, so muß es [das Zwei-in-Einem] immer noch als eine Randerscheinung angesehen werden.³¹

Die Differenz zu anderen ist allerdings mit der Gebürtigkeit gegeben. Im Geboren-Werden wird eine Differenz gesetzt als Vereinzelung. Die Gebürtigkeit als Chance für einen Neuanfang, die nur in Abtrennung vom Anderen möglich ist, ist eines der Steckenpferde in Arendts Handlungstheorie. „Weil jeder Mensch auf Grund seines Geborens ein *initium*, ein Anfang und Neuankömmling in der Welt ist, können Menschen Initiative ergreifen, Anfänger werden und Neues in Bewegung setzen.“³² Gebürtigkeit wird nicht leiblich verstanden, sondern existenziell, als Verfassung und Stärke des Menschen, selber ein Neuanfang

²⁸ *Ibidem*. Vgl. auch Pavlik, Jennifer, „»Im Denken-an bleibt die Fremdheit bestehen. Ununterbrochene Dialoge«: Alterität im Werk von Hannah Arendt,“ *Zeitschrift für interkulturelle Germanistik* 2, Nr. 2 (2011): 77–92, 82. Dieses Alleinsein ist nicht existenziell aufzufassen, sondern vielmehr von den Anderen her. Zum existenziellen Alleinsein vgl. Shaun Gallagher, „A Critique of Existential Loneliness,“ *Topoi* 42 (März 2023).

²⁹ Arendt, *Vom Leben des Geistes*, 186.

³⁰ Vgl. hierzu Loidolt, Sophie, „Hannah Arendts Phänomenologie der Pluralität,“ *HannahArendt.net*, Ausgabe 1, Bd. 9 (Nov 2018): 1–20. Loidolt stellt die Pluralität als „Pluralität der Perspektiven des Weltzugang-Seins“ (*Ibidem*, 6) als *Wer* heraus, wobei dieses gerade die Nebeneinanderstellung der Individuen als unzutreffend erscheinen lässt.

³¹ Arendt, *Über das Böse*; 93–94.

³² Idem, *Vita activa oder vom tätigen Leben* (München, Zürich: Piper, 2007), 215.

zu sein, aber auch einen Neuanfang gestalten zu können, der sich der „Absehbarkeit und Berechenbarkeit“³³ entzieht.³⁴

Die Gebürtigkeit ist aber zugleich eine Abtrennung von Anderen, d. h. sie setzt eine Differenz durch, die die Vereinzelung möglich macht. Das Selbst ist in durchgehender Abtrennung vom Anderen, eine Differenz, die nie aufhört. Im Dialog, im Zwiegespräch, kann es aber immer wieder den Anderen einholen. Die hier stattfindende Prozessualität, die durchgehende Differenzierung, bewahrt vor dem Unmenschlich-Sein, bewahrt davor, die Pluralität aufzuheben.

Was das radikal Böse nun wirklich ist, weiß ich nicht, aber mir scheint, es hat irgendwie mit den folgenden Phänomenen zu tun: Die Überflüssigmachung von Menschen als Menschen (nicht sie als Mittel zu benutzen, was ja ihr Menschsein unangetastet läßt und nur ihre Menschenwürde verletzt, sondern sie qua Menschen überflüssig machen).[...] Dies geschieht, sobald man alle unpredictability ausschaltet, der auf Seite des Menschen die Spontaneität entspricht. Dies alles wiederum entspringt oder besser hängt zusammen mit dem Wahn von einer Allmacht (nicht einfach Machtsucht) *des* Menschen. Wäre *der* Mensch qua Mensch allmächtig, dann wäre in der Tat nicht einzusehen, warum es *die* Menschen geben sollte [...]. In diesem Sinne: die Allmacht des Menschen macht die Menschen überflüssig.³⁵

Vom arendtschen Gedanken der Pluralität her lässt sich die Bedeutung des Zwei-in-Einem und dessen Verwobenheit mit dem Bösen oder Übel im Tun und Lassen verstehen. Pluralität ist nämlich die Aufrechterhaltung der Differenz, jener Differenz, die in uns selbst angelegt ist. Bleibt diese aus, wird sie nicht geübt, wäre das ein Schritt zur Überflüssigmachung des Anderen.

Dialogischer Selbstbezug und Nicht-Indifferenz

Für Arendt besteht das „Einssein“ des einzelnen Menschen in einer Stimmigkeit, die mitunter gar nicht vernünftig durchleuchtet werden kann. Arendt greift hier auf Sokrates zurück, nicht zuletzt um darin

³³ *Ibidem*, 217.

³⁴ Zur Verantwortung durch die Ermöglichung des Neuanfangs in der Gebürtigkeit vgl. Lena Köhler, „Zum Potential der Geburt. Pädagogik, Freiheit und Verantwortung auf Grundlage der Natalität,“ in: *Bildung zwischen Verortung und Verantwortung*, Hrg. Pia Diergarten, Sarah Ganss, Clemens Klein, Lena Köhler, Jana Müller und Christoph Schröder (Weinheim – Basel: Beltz Juventa, 2023), 158–71.

³⁵ Arendt, *Ich will verstehen*, 245.

ihre Kritik an der kantschen Verankerung der Moral in der Vernunft durchzuführen. Wenn bei Kant die Moral im Gewissen als „moralisches Gesetz“ verankert ist und somit vernünftig bleibt, ist für Arendt die Instanz der Moral nicht gegeben.³⁶ Vielmehr begründet sie diese im Dialogischen, das auf keine letzte Instanz zurückgeführt werden kann.

Den Bezug zu sich selbst bestimmt Arendt als dialogisch. Das heißt, im Grunde führe ich mit mir selbst ein Gespräch, wenn ich mit mir selbst im „Stop and think“ zu Rate gehe. Mit Blick auf Gadamer wäre es eine gute Frage, ob das Gespräch tatsächlich als solches verzeichnet werden kann. Denn zu einem Gespräch gehört der Andere, zu einem Dialog gehören Frage und Antwort.

Etwas ist für uns ein Gespräch gewesen, was etwas in uns hinterlassen hat. Nicht dies, daß wir da etwas Neues erfahren haben, machte das Gespräch zu einem Gespräch, sondern daß uns im anderen etwas begegnet ist, was uns in unserer eigenen Weiterfahrung so noch nicht begegnet war. Was die Philosophen in der Kritik des monologischen Denkens bewegte, das erfährt der einzelne an sich selber. Das Gespräch hat eine verwandelnde Kraft. Wo ein Gespräch gelungen ist, ist uns etwas geblieben und ist in uns etwas geblieben, das uns verändert hat.³⁷

Der innere „Dialog“ stünde dann scheinbar eher einer monologischen inneren Rede näher.³⁸ Und doch nimmt der innere Dialog auch bei Gadamer im Anschluss an Plato eine zentrale Stellung ein:

Wir denken in Worten. Denken heißt, sich etwas denken. Und sich etwas denken heißt, sich etwas sagen. Insofern hat Plato das Wesen des Denkens, wie ich meine, völlig richtig erkannt, wenn er es den inneren Dialog der Seele mit sich nennt, einen Dialog, der ein beständiges Sich-Überholen, auf sich selbst und seine eigenen Meinungen und Ansichten zweifelnd und einwendend Zurückkommen ist. Und wenn etwas unser menschliches Denken kennzeichnet, dann ist es eben dieser unendliche und nie endgültig zu etwas führende Dialog mit sich selber.³⁹

³⁶ Arendt, *Über das Böse*, 48.

³⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Die Unfähigkeit zum Gespräch, Gesammelte Werke 2* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 207–15, 211.

³⁸ Für einen kurz gefassten geschichtlich aufgeklärten Überblick zur traditionsreichen Debatte bzgl. der inneren Rede vgl., Art. „Wort, inneres / Rede, innere,“ in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 12, Hrg. Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer und Gottfried Gabriel (Basel: Schwabe, 2004), Sp. 1037–50.

³⁹ Gadamer, „Wie weit schreibt Sprache das Denken vor?“, in idem, *Gesammelte Werke 2* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 199–206, 200.

Die spezifisch menschliche Eigenschaft liegt, so Arendt, im „stummen Dialog“ mit sich selbst, eben nicht als eingeborene Stimme des Gewissens, sondern als „Bedürfnis [...] die Dinge durchzusprechen; daß alle Menschen mit sich selbst sprechen“.⁴⁰

Selbst wenn ich Einer bin, bin ich nicht schlicht Einer; vielmehr habe ich ein Selbst und stehe zu diesem Selbst als meinem eigenen Selbst in Beziehung. Dieses Selbst ist keinesfalls eine Illusion; indem es mit mir spricht, macht es sich hörbar (ich rede mit mir selbst, ich bin mir nicht nur meiner selbst bewußt), und in diesem Sinne bin ich, als Einer, Zwei-in-Einem, und es kann Harmonie oder Disharmonie mit dem Selbst geben.⁴¹

Arendt sieht bei Sokrates, dass Menschen nicht allein „vernünftige Tiere“, sondern „denkende Wesen“ sind.⁴² Diese Hervorhebung besagt mehr, als auf den ersten Blick erkennbar, denn im Grunde bedeutet dieses ja, dass der Schritt weg von einer vernünftigen Instanz, wie diese etwa bei Kant zu finden ist, getan wird, und das Gespräch konstitutiv für die Einheitlichkeit des Selbst wird.

Zumal ein Gespräch jedoch Gesprächspartner voraussetzt, um ein solches zu sein, stellt sich die Frage, mit wem ich rede, wenn ich mit mir selbst ins Gespräch trete. Im Grunde nehme ich im Selbstgespräch Bezug auf früher Erfahrenes, auf Erinnerungen die ich revidiere, abwäge. Zugleich ist es auch eine Gefühlswelt die mitspielt, ein Abstimmen mit dem Komplex, der mich als Person ausmacht.

Auch dann, wenn wir mit uns zusammen sind, wenn wir dieses Allein-Sein artikulieren oder aktualisieren, merken wir, daß wir in Gesellschaft sind, in der Gesellschaft mit uns selbst. Verlassenheit, dieser Albtraum, der uns, wie wir alle wissen, mitten in einer Masse überfallen / kann, ist genau dieses Von-sich-selbst-verlassen-Sein – die zeitweise Unfähigkeit, sozusagen Zwei-in-Einem zu werden, wenn wir uns in einer Situation befinden, wo es keinen Anderen gibt, der uns Gesellschaft leistet.⁴³

Gewiss sind in dieser Spannbreite der Erfahrung, die mich ausmacht, auch andere zugegen, bzw. die Stimmen anderer, die angeeigneten

⁴⁰ Arendt, *Über das Böse*, 73.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 70.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 73.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 78–9.

Einflüsse anderer. Um nur einen Hinweis zu geben, wären die phänomenologischen Untersuchungen von Alfred Schütz weiterführend.

Es ist natürlich statthaft von vor-sozialen Elementen in der Fundierungsstruktur aller Erfahrung zu sprechen. In einer empirisch-genetischen Perspektive ist es aber nur dann möglich, vor-soziale Erfahrungen, Interpretationsschemata und Handlungen nachzuweisen, wenn man mehr oder minder künstlich vom intersubjektiven und sozialen Sinnzusammenhang des Erfahrungsablaufes abstrahiert. Von entscheidender Bedeutung ist hier der Umstand, daß sich das Selbst, auf dem die bewusste Einheit der subjektiven Erfahrungen und Handlungen beruht, in intersubjektiven Vorgängen ausgebildet und deshalb eine historische Sozialstruktur voraussetzt.⁴⁴

Einiges spricht dafür, dass im Gespräch mit sich selbst erst recht andere begegnen, sei es Stimmen der Anderen, sei es die Anderen als soziale Strukturen, die verinnerlicht wurden. So ist das „mir“, dem ich innerlich als „mir selbst“ im Gespräch begegne, in gewisser Weise auch die anderen in mir, die im Zwiegespräch mitwirken. Allerdings sind es nicht irgendwelche andere, sondern jene Anderen, von denen ich mich differenziere, jene Anderen, in deren Gesellschaft ich lebe. In diesem Sinne ist es für Arendt relevant, in welcher Gesellschaft man sich befindet, mit wem man verkehrt.

Ich versuchte zu zeigen, daß unsere Entscheidungen über Recht und Unrecht von der Wahl unserer Gesellschaft, von der Wahl derjenigen, mit denen wir unser Leben zu verbringen wünschen, abhängen werden. [...] Doch ist, so fürchte ich, die Wahrscheinlichkeit weit- aus größer, daß / jemand kommt und uns sagt, es sei ihm egal, jede Gesellschaft sei ihm gut genug. Diese Indifferenz stellt, moralisch und politisch gesprochen, die größte Gefahr dar, auch wenn sie weit verbreitet ist.⁴⁵

Worauf Arendt verweist, ist, um es mit einem Ausdruck von Emanuel Levinas zu sagen, die Besinnung auf die Nicht-Indifferenz. Die weiter oben erwähnte Gebürtigkeit lässt im Grunde keine Indifferenz zu, da

⁴⁴ Alfred Schütz und Thomas Luckmann, *Strukturen der Lebenswelt* (Konstanz – München: UKV, 2017), 333; die Zeitstrukturen wären dabei ebenfalls zu bedenken. Ebenfalls Schütz unterscheidet auch zwischen dem wirkenden Selbst, das in der Gegenwart die laufenden Handlungen lebt, und dem Selbst in reflektiver Einstellung, das er als geteiltes Selbst auffasst. Siehe: Alfred Schütz, *Symbol Wirklichkeit und Gesellschaft, Gesammelte Aufsätze. Das Problem der sozialen Wirklichkeit* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 237–414, 248.

⁴⁵ Arendt, *Über das Böse*, 149–50.

man nicht wirklich gleichgültig den Anderen gegenüber sein kann, zumal man durch die Geburt die Differenz, die Trennung und Verbundenheit zu anderen in sich trägt.⁴⁶ Pluralität setzt Differenz voraus und wenn auch Gesellschaft nivellierend sein kann und oft auch sein muss, d. h. die anderen nicht immer in ihrer Einzigartigkeit gesehen werden können, wie etwa auf einer Bus- oder Zugfahrt, beim Einkaufen auf dem Markt oder im Theater. Die Gesellschaft ist durchaus von einer gewissen Indifferenz gekennzeichnet. Gemeint sind aber die Menschen, die man für sich selbst als näheres und weiteres Umfeld versteht, die Menschen, mit denen man im Gespräch bleibt. In diesem Zusammenhang kommt das Urteil zur Sprache: Wenn im Sich-Besinnen das Denken als inneres Zwiegespräch ausschlaggebend ist, um mit sich selbst stimmig zu sein, so ist im nächsten Schritt des Umgangs mit anderen das Urteil gefragt, durchaus ein Urteil, das auf das Zwiegespräch im Denken aufbaut. Die erwähnte Nicht-Indifferenz ist gerade das Differenzieren, das Urteilen:

Ein bißchen weniger gefährlich [als die Indifferenz] ist eine andere gängige moderne Entscheidung: die häufig anzutreffende Tendenz, das Urteilen überhaupt zu verweigern. Aus dem Unwillen oder der Unfähigkeit, seine Beispiele und seinen Umgang zu wählen, und dem Unwillen oder der Unfähigkeit, durch Urteil zu Anderen in Beziehung zu treten, entstehen die wirklichen „skandala“, die wirklichen Stolpersteine, welche menschliche Macht nicht beseitigen kann, weil sie nicht von menschlichen oder menschlich verständlichen Motiven verursacht wurden. Darin liegt der Horror des Bösen und zugleich seine Banalität.⁴⁷

Festzuhalten wäre, dass Arendt im die Pluralität voraussetzenden Einssein und im darin verwurzelten Differenzieren als Urteilen die Möglichkeit sieht, das Böse im Tun zu vermeiden. Zumal im Urteilen das Soziale und somit auch die Perspektive anderer Menschen vorausgesetzt wird, ist einmal mehr die Nicht-Indifferenz gefragt, in der Auswahl der Gesellschaft, in welche man sich begibt, soweit es uns frei steht, diese zu wählen, damit aber auch die Verantwortung der bösen Tat durchaus bei einem selbst

⁴⁶ Vgl. Christoph von Wolzogen, *Emmanuel Levinas – Denken bis zum Äußersten* (Freiburg – München: Alber, 2005), 12: „Aber wie kann überhaupt ein «Selbst» ohne das Andere seiner selbst gedacht werden – allein schon durch seine «Gebürtigkeit» (H. Arendt), die eine «Diachronie», wie Levinas sagt, eine Getrenntheit anzeigt?“

⁴⁷ Arendt, *Über das Böse*, 149–50.

liegt.⁴⁸ Was aber den Menschen trotz der gegebenen Möglichkeit, Böses zu vermeiden, diesen dennoch bewusst böse handeln lässt, dürfte hier als weiterführende Frage offen bleiben, wobei hierfür das oben angeführte wurzellose „größte Böse“ als Stichpunkt gelten dürfte.

⁴⁸ Weiterführend zur Frage nach der Verantwortung durch Urteilbildung vgl. Annabel Herzog, "Hannah Arendt's Concept of *Responsibility*," *Studies in Social and Political Thought* (October 2004): 39–52.

Badness, Wickedness, Evil and the Death of the Soul

PETER M. S. HACKER*

1. Just as “good” is the most general adjective of commendation, laudation, or approval, so too “bad” is the most general adjective of condemnation, criticism, or disapproval. Just as “good” is a scalar modifier (“good”, “better”, “best”), so too “bad” is a scalar modifier (“bad”, “worse”, “worst”). It is puzzling that the scalar modifiers have a different root than “bad”. Curiously, “badder” and “baddest” are used colloquially by primary school teachers to mean naughtier and naughtiest. Just as there are varieties of (kinds of) goodness, such as medical goodness (the goodness of health, organs and perceptual faculties), instrumental goodness (the goodness of instruments, tools and artefacts), technical goodness (the goodness of skills), hedonic goodness (the goodness of being pleased, of pleasures and enjoyments), and so forth, so too there are varieties of badness. The cousins of *bad* are *weak*, *poor*, *pathetic*, *unsatisfactory*, *inadequate*, *harmful*, *worthless*, *defective*, *deficient*, *detrimental*. Which of these is apt, in any particular case, depends upon the variety of badness under consideration.

It is noteworthy that attributions of badness are *sometimes* privative, i. e. that ascriptions of badness sometimes signify no more than lack of good-making qualities. So, for example, a bad knife is a knife that does not cut well, a bad joke is a joke that is not funny, and one has a bad memory if one cannot remember what others can. But it is by no means always so. Food is bad if it is rotting or infected, pain is bad if it is severe, an examination script is bad if it is full of mistakes or if its conclusions are ill-supported, a painting is bad if it is unskilfully executed, or if it is sentimental, in bad taste, or kitsch.

Just as there are varieties of goodness, so too there are varieties of badness. *Medical badness*, like medical goodness, has as its focal point the health of a being. Someone is in bad health if he is ill, has an infection, injury, or illness. He may suffer from poor health if his condition is chronic. Conceptually linked to the badness of health of a living creature are the deficiencies of organs and faculties. An organ is bad or weak (e.g. bad

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eyes, a weak heart) and a sense-faculty poor (poor eyesight, poor sense of smell), when they fail to fulfil their characteristic function optimally, relative to the kind of being in question (the badness is species-relative: good eyesight in a human being would be grossly inadequate in an eagle). Deficiencies of organs and faculties deleteriously affect the agent's ability to lead a normal life for a being of its kind. Badness of health is a focal point around which are clustered the notions of a substance (stuff) being medically bad, a condition being medically bad, and an activity being medically bad for the health and fitness of a being. So, many kinds of foods (*foodstuffs*) are bad for one or are bad for one if consumed in excess (sugars, fats, alcohol), relative to one's needs and circumstances. Similarly, smoking is bad for one, being overweight (a condition) deleteriously affects one's health, and boxing (an activity) is liable to damage one's brain.

Corresponding to technical goodness, i. e. the goodness of skills, is *technical badness*. Like technical goodness, technical badness has at least four sub-forms: the badness at a craft (tinker, shoemaker, carpenter), vocational badness (e. g. of a lawyer, doctor, teacher), ludic badness [a much-needed new use of "ludic"] (of sportsmen, mountain climbers, game players), and performance badness (of actors, musicians, singers). A professional or a craftsman is technically bad if they are not merely poor in the exercise of their skill, but incompetent. A poor solicitor or dentist, a poor plumber or gardener, may be better than none, but a bad one should be avoided, as their work will probably be sub-standard, and they are liable to do more harm than good. A bad mountain climber may endanger the lives of his fellow mountaineers, and a bad actor may ruin the play or film in which he acts badly. Similar considerations apply to the derivative form of technical badness, namely: the poorness or badness of a technique. A poor technique is lamentable, but a bad one is likely to be positively harmful. So too, artefactual badness consists in the poorness, badness, inadequacy and inefficiency of instruments, tools, and machines on the one hand and of non-instrumental artefacts, such as roads, houses, bridges, airports and harbours, on the other. Their various forms of badness make them dangerous to life and limb, inefficient in subserving the goal for which they were made.

It should by now be straightforward to articulate the other varieties of badness, such as the badness of the detrimental (as opposed to the beneficial), of the anti-hedonic (the painful, uncomfortable, unpleasant, disagreeable, unpalatable, distressing, repulsive, and the disgusting), and

of the anti-eudaimonic (unhappiness, misery, grief and sorrow). We leave the exercise to the reader.

To be sure, there are many other predications of badness of one kind or another that do not fit readily into the selected varieties. Currency is bad if it is debased, weak, or counterfeit; laws are bad if they are unjust, ill-drafted and so vague or ambiguous; debts are bad if they cannot be discharged; a child is bad if naughty, unruly, rude, and disobedient. And so on.

Precisely because there are varieties of badness, there are equally many different forms of bad deeds, acts that it is wrong to perform and omissions that it is wrong to make. They may be medically, economically, legally, politically, wrong. They may be ill-informed, ill-advised, inefficient, undemocratic. Sometimes their consequences may be appalling (e.g. in relation to a pandemic) and moral culpability may be incurred, even though the motives for doing them may not have been malevolent. In the absence of circumstantial justification or extenuating circumstances, they are wrong, and their agents are blameworthy.

2. With these qualifications, reminders and elucidations, we may now turn to our main theme: moral badness. Our first port of call is lexical. What are the subjects of which moral badness can legitimately be predicated? *Human beings*, people, may be morally bad if they are cruel, malicious, unjust, dishonest, vindictive, or arrogant in their dealings with their fellow human beings. These are *character traits* morally bad people have, dispositions of character that are themselves morally bad, or worse – wicked or evil. They are *vices* – in the more extreme cases, *deadly vices*. Such vices are manifest in bad, wicked, or evil *deeds*, motivated by bad, wicked or evil *motives and intentions*. Bad, wicked, and evil deeds characteristically have bad or evil *consequences*. The deadliest of vices is cruelty to human beings or to animals. Montaigne characterized cruelty as “the extremist of all vices”, Thomas Fuller observed that a man of cruelty “is God’s enemy”. To the cruel man, cruelty “is the highest kind of pleasure” (Walter Savage Landor) and it “requires no motive outside of itself, but only requires an opportunity” (George Eliot). It is bred by fear and stupidity, thoughtlessness and indifference, unlimited power and lust for revenge.

In addition to human beings, morally bad deeds are done by human institutions: international organisations, governments, non-governmental institutions, multinational corporations, banks, local government

authorities, and so on. These wrong-doers will not be discussed here. It is relatively easy to see how to extend our analyses from people to institutions, although it is often difficult to allocate blame to corporate subordinates to the relevant culpable CEO.

To say that someone is a bad person or to say that something is a bad thing to do commonly has the illocutionary force of moral disapprobation, criticism or condemnation. But it is also the crudest and least informative of the triplet, “bad”, “wicked”, “evil”. Often it is positively jejune or grossly inappropriate – as in saying that Hitler was a bad man, or that genocide is a bad practice, or that inflicting pain for fun is a bad thing to do. Wickedness and evil are deep forms of moral offense and wrong-doing. To say of something or someone that they are evil is the most severe form of moral condemnation we possess.

It is striking, and, as we shall see, significant, that “wicked” has both comparative and superlative forms, namely: “wickedder” and “wickedest”, comparable to “bad”, “worse”, “worst”, but “evil” does not. It has only intensifiers, viz. “more evil” and “most evil”. This calls out for explanation. It is surely akin to the comparable grammatical fact that one cannot be better than best. Murdering two million innocent people is *doing* more evil than murdering one million. But someone who murders two babies or infants for fun is not twice as evil as someone who murders only one for fun. If someone has intentionally done evil, then, in the absence of justifying or extenuating circumstances, he is evil. If he does further evil, that does not make *him* more evil – it only means that he has *done* more evil. It involves a deep misunderstanding to speculate or argue over who is the most evil of the great twentieth-century dictators, Hitler, Stalin, or Mao – all one can do is debate which of them *did* most evil. But surely, if evil-doers not only do evil, but also take pleasure in the evil they do and publicly and proudly proclaim it to the world, as did the Hamas murderers on October 7, 2023 who slaughtered Israeli Jews, old age pensioners, men and women, girls and boys, children, and babies in an orgy of sadism and evil joy, are they not more evil than others, who do not proclaim it with pride? No; they are only more depraved, contemptible, and repulsive in their deliberate and gleeful shattering of the moral order of humanity.

3. We now turn to the etymology of “evil”. It is revealing and suggestive. The English “evil” is derived from Old English *yfel*, Middle English *uvel*, and Old Frisian *evel*. It is related to Old High German *ubil*, which

is the source of modern German's *übel*. The root meaning is "exceeding the measure" or "overstepping proper limits". It is striking that although Latin (like the later romance languages) has a large toolbox of forms of badness, e.g. *malus*, *nequam*, *nefas*, *improbis*, *pravus*, *perversus*, *turpe*, *corruptus*, *vitiosus*, it has no single expression that corresponds to "evil". Similarly, ancient Greek has no single expression that corresponds exactly to "evil" – *kakós* signifies bad, wicked or evil indifferently, as well as spiteful and mischievous. Like Latin, it has a rich vocabulary of opprobrium, e.g. *kakia*, *aischros*, *diephtharmenos*, *fáulos*, *parephtharmenos*, *ponēros*, *mochtheros*, but no single word that corresponds precisely to "evil". Even ancient Hebrew has to make do with *ra*, which signifies bad, wicked and evil indifferently, although it has many other terms of opprobrium, e.g. *pesha*, *khet*, *avon*, *zadon*.

Germanic languages in general, and English in particular, are fortunate to have at hand a direct means to distinguish between the most extreme form of moral iniquity from moral badness and wickedness. *Evil* signifies what is beyond the pale. It belongs in the same toolbox as *demonic*, *diabolic*, *devilish*, *fiendish* – which is hardly surprising given general archaic beliefs in supernatural evil, and sits side by side with *depraved*, *degenerate*, *corrupt*, as well as *vile*, *foul*, *odious*, and *repulsive*, *despicable*, *repugnant*.

The most important clue we take away from this short etymological and comparative foray is that evil-doers, in some sense that demands explanation, set themselves irremediably beyond the pale.

4. It has long been customary to distinguish between super-natural evil, natural evil, and human evil. The idea of super-natural evil is widespread in religions, both monotheist and duo-theist. Gods may be evil, as is Ahriman according to Zoroastrian beliefs; fallen angels may be evil, as are the Devil or Satan in Catholic beliefs; demons, the super-natural servants of Satan, are evil, as are humans who have sold their souls to the Devil. This belongs to the religious mythology of evil.

Natural evils are natural catastrophes that destroy human life, property, crops, and means of livelihood. They may be floods or droughts, earthquakes or tsunamis, volcanic eruptions and avalanches. Biological natural evils are plagues and epidemics. The evil of natural evils consists in their results, not necessarily in any conscious agency, although in the case of global warming, the natural catastrophes are caused by human

beings, governments, and corporations. They are conceived to be evils because they cause the deaths, often agonized deaths, of thousands of human beings, and because they destroy the means of human livelihood. In pre-scientific eras, it was common to explain natural evils by reference to the gods or to God. No other explanation was available for such catastrophes. Polytheism provided ready explanations in terms of strife between gods (e.g. Zeus and Hera) or the interference of one or another god in human affairs (e.g. Apollo and Athena). Dualist religions, such as Zoroastrianism or Manichaeism, offered explanations in terms of cosmic dramas between non-omnipotent forces of good (e.g. Ahura Mazda) and forces of evil (e.g. Ahriman) in which humanity is caught up. Monotheist religions understandably had more difficulty explaining natural evils and in trying to explain the ways of God to man. Since a benevolent God could not be faulted, the fault must be humanity's. Guilt was imputed where no guilt was meet.

Human evil consists in the morally depraved, wicked, vicious, corrupt, and above all, cruel. Human agents may be evil (evil-doers), human deeds may be evil (evil-doing), and the upshot or results of human deeds may be evil (evil done).

There has, in recent decades, been a scientistic trend to explain evil away, in effect to deny that evil exists, to aver that human beings are not *really* evil. The scientism has its roots either in determinism (Laplacean or Marxist-historical) or in the medicalization of responsibility (psychological or psycho-analytic; behaviourist; cognitive neuro-scientific). Such forms of scientism argue that human evil is merely a surface phenomenon, since in truth science has shown that we are all victims of forces beyond our control, such forces being the economic system and poverty, the social system and social class differentiation, the political system and alienation, colonialism, the unconscious mind, the workings of the brain, and so forth. Accordingly, we are not free moral agents and are neither answerable nor responsible for what we do. In a period of glorification of victimhood, as the Anglophone world is now undergoing, this has powerful appeal. Such scientism needs robust refutation – some of it is an exaggeration of truths applicable only in special cases. The general abnegation of human responsibility is in effect the abnegation of humanity. If we are not answerable for our deeds and responsible for what we do, we are not free beings with two-way powers to act or refrain from acting in a given circumstance (liberty of indifference) and we are not able to

act for reasons (liberty of spontaneity). If so, we are not rational beings at all, merely pawns on the chessboard of fortune or cogwheels in the machinery of causation.

It is important that we face the truth about ourselves. We *do* have capacity-rationality, however weak it may be in times of crisis. We *have* eaten of the Tree of Good and Evil – that is to say, we *do* have the capacity knowingly to do evil as well as good. We are rational beings – we *can* reason; we are moral agents; we are language-users; we are not only thinkers and talkers, but, as Marx insisted against Hegel, also tool-makers; but we should not forget that the main tools our remote ancestors made were weapons, arrow heads and war-hammers.

5. Evil is the deliberate infliction of death, severe bodily harm, or extreme suffering on another innocent human being or sentient creature without adequate warrant or in excess of what is required for the attainment of a justifying or excusing goal. This is not a definition, but a characterization of paradigm cases. To be sure, such a characterization requires amplification. For there are bound to be disagreements about what counts as a warrant, as justification or excuse, and what counts as “being in excess”. This area of disagreement constitutes the “borderlands of evil”. It is not so much a fuzzy borderline, characteristic of vague concepts, but a broad grey area of unavoidable dispute from case to case. The disputes turn on the performance of *necessary evils*. The term is misleading, since what it signifies is, roughly speaking, doing harm in order to prevent greater harm. A surgeon who removes a patient’s eye in order to prevent spread of cancer is not doing an evil. Adequate warrant for the deliberate infliction of extreme suffering may be given by medical necessity: to save a life, or to cure a patient in dire circumstances, when no analgesics are available. Killing another may be warranted by self-defence, or by saving someone from an agonizing but unavoidable death (a driver trapped in the cabin of a burning lorry). It may be excused by the necessities of a just war (World War II), by the duty of legitimate governments to preserve the state from destruction (Ukraine in 2022), or the duty of the state to protect its citizens from savage slaughter (Israel in 2023). What should not be open to reasonable dispute is the existence of pure evil – cruelty, the deliberate and patently unwarranted infliction of suffering on an animal (pouring petrol over an animal and setting it alight for amusement); or on another innocent human being (a wide range of horrific examples

of cruelty to children is given by Ivan Karamazov in discussion with his brother Alyosha in Dostoevsky's novel).

Being evil is not a vice, any more than being virtuous is a virtue. They are not character traits. Rather, evil is the general form of deadly vices, just as virtue is the common form of the moral virtues. An important distinction can be drawn between wickedness and evil. Such a distinction is perhaps explicative: cutting the ragged edges of ordinary usage for an elucidatory purpose. Just as there are borderlands of evil in which disputation about warrants, justifications, and excuses take place, so too there is not a sharp borderline between wickedness and evil, indeed, not even a vague borderline, but a broad borderland in which casuistry finds its space.

6. The natural roots of moral goodness lie in feelings, in particular in our disposition to care for others, and in maternal care for offspring, which evolves into one paradigm form of love, namely motherly love, and into compassion. We do, mercifully, have a natural disposition for sympathy and empathy (not to be confused: the former is a form of feeling, the latter a form of understanding). To be sure, our natural disposition to care requires refinement and transformation by family life, moral education, social life, and reflection. Whatever innate propensity to sympathy we have is not equally distributed. It is easily crushed by adverse circumstances and brutalization. Women tend to be more compassionate than men, for obvious biological reasons. Family life varies greatly from family to family, from society to society and epoch to epoch. Moral education is equally variable, dependent upon a multiplicity of factors, and so too are the standards of public behaviour, both with regard to small morals and courtesy, and with respect to public morality and criminality. It is patent that not only does social morality vary greatly in different times and places, but the degree to which any given society lives up to its own moral standards is similarly variable. The struggle between right and wrong is part of the human condition.

What, then, are the roots of the morally bad, of the wicked and evil? They are individual, social, religious, and ideological. As we have emphasized, it is characteristic of our species, especially, but not only, of the male of the species, to be highly competitive, aggressive, single minded in pursuit of goals, to have a strong desire for wealth and possessions, and a lust for power. We have a natural tendency to selfishness and indifference

to the sufferings of others that constrains and limits our natural sympathies. We have a powerful sexual drive, an inclination to sexual possessiveness, with a corresponding disposition to jealousy.

Consequently, individual motives for doing evil and the motives that characterize evil-doers are manifold, wonderfully depicted in great works of literature and drama: envy and resentment of the status, power, and wealth of another (Cassius in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*); jealousy of another who has taken the love that one feels is one's due (Othello); unrestrained hedonism (Wilde's *Dorian Gray*), boredom (Hedda Gabler, in Ibsen's eponymous play); sexual lust (Tarquin, in Roman legend); lust for power and ambition (in Shakespeare's *Richard III*); sadism and natural malevolence (Claggart in Melville's *Billy Budd*); hatred and revenge (Heathcliffe in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*); and greed for wealth.

The social roots of the morally bad lie in our natural tribalism, the correlate of which is xenophobia. Our need for a sense of identity, i. e. for an awareness of what we stand for and to what group we belong and identify with, is greatly strengthened by finding an object to hate, either external to our own society or nation state, or within our society or state. This is greatly exacerbated by religious and ideological systems of beliefs that encourage bigotry, prejudice, and self-righteousness.

Much evil that is done is group behaviour. Group evil-doing is an outlet for human aggression. It provides camaraderie in violence and destruction both in war and in peace, and it strengthens a weak sense of identity. When directed at weaker groups in society, it gives evil-doers a sense of superiority. Being a form of collective action, it relieves the individual of any sense of personal responsibility. If a leader is involved, loyalty to the leader unites the group and abrogates the burden of decision-making. A unifying ideology or religion, driving violent and destructive action, gives meaning to what may otherwise be dull or empty lives. Human beings, when their evil propensities are unleashed, enjoy destruction and violence as well as loss of identity in mob behaviour. In warfare, it commonly offers aggressive males the temptations of booty and rape.

7. Questions about motivation of unquestionable evil need to be raised. Can evil be rational? If this question means: is reflection, planning, and effective instrumental reasoning involved in doing evil? – then the answer is obviously often “Yes”. There can be spontaneous evil, as often occurs in the course of riots and demonstrations, in which a demonstrator is

swept away in the excitement of the mob and fatally injures someone. In such cases, evil is often done in a frenzy of destructiveness, in which an agent has no motive. To be sure, that does not relieve the evil-doer of responsibility. Similarly, evil is often done in an explosion of anger, in which the evil deed, perhaps killing someone with a blow, is the form in which the rage is manifest. But much evil is deliberately planned well in advance and involves rational deliberation. On the other hand, there can be no legitimate justification or excuse for doing evil, in as much as, other things being equal, that something is evil gives the best possible reason for not doing it.

Can doing evil be reasonable? No; being reasonable involves taking into account the legitimate concerns of other people and is linked to an appreciation of values, such as fairness and justice, as well as the demands of duty and obligation. That is precisely what doing evil precludes. To do evil is to become and be evil, and that is to be in bondage to all the baser and destructive instincts and drives of humankind.

Can evil itself be a motive for action? No, for that something is evil provides the best possible reason for not doing it. “Because it is evil” is not an intelligible answer to the question “Why did you do it?”, since its being evil is the most extreme form of condemnation. One cannot intelligibly do something “for the sake of evil”. Milton’s Lucifer’s and Verdi’s Iago’s, “Evil be thou my good!”, strictly speaking, makes no sense. This, one may well say, is a version of the ancient doctrine that all fully intentional action must be done *sub specie boni*, that the agent must see at least *some* good in what he is doing.

It is therefore no coincidence that evil-doers find other reasons for their evil deeds. They may insist that what they are doing isn’t *really* evil, that their victims are not *really human* – they are just plague germs (Enver Pasha speaking of the Turkish genocide of Armenians), bacillae of racial tuberculosis (Hitler on the Jews), parasites (Stalin on the Ukrainian kulaks during the Holodomor), a cancer in society that must be eradicated (a favoured anti-semitic trope). Strikingly, one of the characteristic features of genocidal evil is the strenuous effort to dehumanize the victims. There is always an existential tension between holding the victims not to be human, but germs, bacillae, and cancers, and striving to humiliate them – for only human beings can be humiliated. Genocidal evil characteristically involves the gross maltreatment of the victims, the rape and murder of women before the eyes of their husbands, forcing women

into sex slavery, demeaning and humiliating torture, forcing men to kill their friends. Most significantly, genocidal evil destroys the very souls of the victims by making them destroy what is most sacred to them (for example, a Nazi officer forcing an elderly rabbi to spit upon the scrolls of the Torah, and when he could spit no more, spitting into his mouth to make him continue, an episode recorded in Chaim Kaplan's *Warsaw Diary*).¹ Our horror at this goes beyond horror at the infinite humiliation of the victim. It is equally a response to the assault upon the moral order of humanity (something similar was manifest in the Hamas atrocities perpetrated upon Israeli Jews on October 7, 2023). This analysis has deep conceptual and moral consequences.

8. Any history of human evil makes it evident that evil doers, in destroying the humanity of their victims, set themselves irremediably beyond the pale of humanity. For they deliberately and *gleefully* shatter the moral order of humanity. It is here that we can differentiate between evil and wickedness. The wicked are sometimes capable of redemption. If they come to recognize the wrong they have done, regret doing it, feel genuine remorse and try, in whatever ways possible, to make good the harm done, they *can be forgiven*. But those who have done evil have no conscience and typically show no remorse. The only senior Nazi at the Nuremberg Trials to avow remorse was Speer, who blatantly lied to escape hanging, as was demonstrated by his biographer Gitta Sereny.²

Forgiveness is a problematic notion. The nature of forgiveness is unclear. The *agents of forgiveness* are human beings. People forgive others *for* their misdeeds and wrong-doings. Is forgiving *an act*? Is it voluntary or involuntary or neither? To say "I forgive you" is a voluntary quasi-performative that commits one to abandon holding a wrong-doer to account and to cease resenting his behaviour. The offender's blameworthy deed is no less wrong as a result of forgiveness – it is the wrong-doer that is forgiven, not the wrong-done. But one may forgive an offender without any speech-act. So is forgiving *an event* that happens to the forgiver? No. Forgiveness for wrong-doing may take time, sometimes a long time, as the injury done heals, ceases to be an object of awareness, and no longer perturbs one. It is then neither voluntary nor involuntary. Nevertheless, one

¹ Quoted in Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: an Absolute Conception* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 1.

² Gitta Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth* (London: Picador, 2017).

is answerable for forgiving someone when one should not have forgiven, just as one may be answerable for believing someone when one should not have believed. And one is answerable for not forgiving, when one should have forgiven, as one may be answerable for not believing when one should have believed. One may be under an obligation to forgive someone (for example, for the sake of the love one bore his parents), and one may be under an obligation not to forgive (if, for example, one swore an oath not to forgive, as Hannibal Barca swore to his father Hamilcar not to forgive Rome for the First Punic War). But an obligation to forgive cannot be *to* the wrong-doer, since no one has a right to be forgiven. One may beg for forgiveness, but one cannot demand it. The evil-doer does not deserve forgiveness, since the evil done puts him beyond the pale. He may not beg for forgiveness, but only for mercy.

It is not only the nature of forgiveness that needs elucidation. There are further deep questions concerning who has the right to forgive, what deeds warrant forgiveness, what are the limits of forgiveness, and what are the consequences of forgiveness. It is evident that the forgiver must have an appropriate *locus standi*. The victim may forgive, but the friend of the victim cannot. The parents of a murdered child or the children of a murdered parent may forgive the murderer in appropriate circumstances, but others cannot. Justifying or extenuating circumstances may warrant forgiveness. Beyond that, forgiveness for wrong-doing can be judged only in relation to the character and history of the wrong-doer, the available alternatives in the circumstances, the intentions and purposes of his deeds, the goals and motives he had in view. Any decision must be ideographic, rather than nomothetic, save in the case of *evident* evil-doing.

Self-forgiveness is as unlike forgiveness of others as self-love is unlike the love of others, or as self-deception is unlike the deception of others. To forgive oneself, one must first have lost one's self-respect, feel deeply ashamed of oneself for what one takes to be a profound wrong one has done. To forgive oneself is to cease hating oneself, to stop despising oneself, and to desist from self-contempt.

9. Wickedness can, in certain cases and certain circumstances, be forgiven. The person who has knowingly and intentionally done a wicked deed in the absence of justifying or extenuating circumstances, may nevertheless be redeemed by his honest acceptance of responsibility, his sincere regret and remorse, and by his striving to make amends for his

wrong-doing in whatever ways possible for him. Evil doers, by contrast, have set themselves apart from humanity. To deny the humanity of other human beings and to strive to destroy their humanity, to slaughter the innocent, to inflict unbridled suffering on them as has been done by countless *genocidaires*, is not only to destroy the humanity of one's victims, it is to do evil, to do what is unforgiveable. The very idea that human beings *could* be forgiven for evil deeds is unclear. Who could possibly have the right to forgive the German genocide of the Hereros in German South-West Africa; the genocide of the Armenians, first by the Ottomans and later by the Ittihadists; who could have the right to forgive Stalin's mass slaughter of kulaks and subsequent genocidal murder of Ukrainians in the Holodomor; the Nazi genocide of the Jews; Pol Pot's genocide of his own people; the genocide committed in Rwanda, East Timor, Nigeria, and so on and so forth? One who intentionally does evil to another human being or to a group of human beings, to a tribe or a people, *have destroyed their own soul*.

10. We need the concept of the soul no less than we need the concept of the mind, and for similar reasons.

The concept of the mind is in effect a way of presenting the rational and volitional powers of human beings and the exercise of those powers. The mind is not an immaterial substance connected via the pineal gland with the human body (as Descartes supposed). Nor is it identical with a material substance, namely the brain, lodged within the skull of a human being. For one's mind does not weigh three pounds and is not seven inches high either. In short, the mind is not a something – it is not an “entity” of any kind and so neither an immaterial substance nor a material one; but it is not a nothing either – human beings really do have a mind (after all, they are not mindless).

We speak of a thought's crossing our mind (something's occurring to us), of bearing something in mind (being aware of some fact), of turning our mind to some subject (focusing our attention on a certain topic). Similarly, we talk of calling something to mind (recollecting something) and of committing something to mind (memorising something). So too we speak of making up our mind (deciding), changing our mind (revising our decision), being in two minds whether to do something (being indecisive), and of having half a mind to do something (being inclined or tempted to do it).

We speak of someone having a mind as sharp as a razor (being an incisive thinker), of having a dirty mind (being inclined to think sexually indecent thoughts) and of having an original mind (able to come up with novel ideas and solutions). But in so doing, we are not speaking of some *thing* that is sharp, dirty, and original. We are speaking of a human being with distinctive powers of ratiocination. Our talk of the mind is best thought of as a *form of presentation* or form of *representation*. It is a useful form of pseudo-entification. We represent the mind as if it were a kind of object – but, of course, it isn't. We present the mind as if it were an *agent* of thought: that within us that thinks and reasons (as both Thomas Reid and J. S. Mill suggested) – but it isn't. *My mind* is not the agent of my thoughts, memories, intentions, and decisions. For to be sure, it is not my mind that makes up its mind (my mind does not have a mind) any more than it is my mind that is in half a mind to V (to do something) – it is *I* who am tempted or inclined to V.

All our talk of the mind is an oblique way of speaking about human intellectual powers and their exercise. This *form of representation* is useful. It enables us to compare different human beings' intellectual and volitional abilities and their exercise in a compact, convenient, and picturesque way. It meets a patent need in our thought and talk about ourselves.

11. But we stand in just as deep a need of a form of representation of our moral powers and our moral sensibility. We speak, rightly, of there being *darkness in the soul* of a human being – a lack of moral sensibility; we speak, correctly, of *genoçidaires* as *lacking a soul*; we may remark with Martha Gellhorn, commenting on Adolf Eichmann, that we must *guard our own souls in the face of evil*; Kurtz, in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, peers into his own soul as he is dying and can find nothing there but horror. We speak, perfectly intelligibly, of those who take material advantage of evil done by others (e.g. by witch-hunters in Salem or East Anglia in the seventeenth century or by *Einsatzgruppen* in the Ukraine and in Poland in World War II) by expropriating the property of the victims, as people who have *allowed their souls to wither*. Raskolnikov is described as a "lost soul", and Coleridge's ancient mariner is a "damned soul". We describe people as having a "beautiful soul", a "noble soul", or a "gentle soul". We speak of some forms of labour as "soul destroying" – a dulling of sensibility by drudgery. Here too one's soul may be said to wither, although it would be more accurate to speak of the *withering of one's spirit*. For it is

one's liveliness, responsiveness to experience, engagement with one's fellow human beings, and capacity for joy that are being crushed.

Socrates sapiently remarked

There is a part of us which is improved by healthy actions and ruined by unhealthy ones. If we spoil it by taking the advice of non-experts, will life be worth living once this part is ruined? The part I mean is the body ...

What about that within us which is mutilated by wrong actions, and benefited by right ones? Is life worth living with this right part ruined? Or do we believe that this, whatever it maybe, in which right and wrong operate, is of less importance than the body?³

The medical analogy is surely profound. We care a great deal about our physical integrity and our good health. Loss of a limb is a great misfortune in as much as it deprives us of our ability to function as a normal human being. Moreover, since opportunities are correlative to abilities, we may also lose many of the opportunities available to those more fortunate. Are there then not features of our non-bodily nature that can be damaged, even irremediably damaged, by abuse and misuse, namely by doing evil? With such loss of our moral powers are human possibilities for doing, becoming, and being not foreclosed? Is Plato not wise to challenge us: should we not care for our soul at least as much as we care for our physical constitution and health?

We need a secular concept of the soul no less than we need the concept of the mind. For we need a way of presenting our moral sensibility. It is noteworthy that just as we are prone to contrast the mind with the body, so too we are prone to contrast the soul with the flesh. This is not surprising, as the appetites, which we share with animals, are bound to our physical nature, needs, and cravings. The appetites may hold us in bondage if egotism, self-indulgence, and hedonism rule our lives. Alcoholism, gluttony, and concupiscence may enslave us. But these are not somatic characteristics: it is not one's body that is gluttonous, given to alcoholism, beset with the priapic afflictions of a Don Juan or the insatiable lusts of a Messalina. That is why the soul is not to be contrasted with the body, but with the flesh.

That human beings have a soul thus conceived is not an empirical statement. It is a constitutive one. It characterizes the nature of mankind,

³ Plato, *Crito* (47d-e).

as does the statement that human beings have a mind. It can be said to be a logico-grammatical statement, since it draws our attention to what it makes sense to say. Of humans, but not of other animals, it makes sense to say that they have lost their soul, destroyed their own soul, that their soul is damaged, twisted or scarred, either by their own evil actions or by what they have been forced to do or to have undergone. Like the mind, the soul is not an “entity” or thing of any kind. The pivotal question is not “What is the soul?”, but rather, “What is it for a creature to possess a soul?”, i.e. what has to be true of a creature for it to be said to have a soul? The answer, in rough outline, is that it must be a language-using creature, it must have a mind, it must know the difference between good and evil, have a moral conscience, be susceptible to remorse and guilt for wrong-doing, and possess moral powers and moral sensibility.⁴

⁴ I am grateful to Hans Oberdiek and Claire Parker for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay. I am indebted to John Kekes, *The Roots of Evil* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005) and idem, *Hard Questions: Facing the Problems of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), chapter 7.

The Problem of Unbearable Pain

DMITRY BIRIUKOV*

In the essay, I deal with the problem of unbearable pain, which, to my mind, is the essence of the problem of evil and suffering. I distinguish between two types of pain. The first type of pain is pain with a potential for utility (while in the case of this type of pain, the potential may remain unrealized). The significance of this type of pain lies in the development and education of the interaction with the self and the surrounding environment of the individual experiencing it. Another type of pain evident in human experience is unbearable pain. Unlike the first type of pain, it lacks the inherent potential for utility, and unbearable pain can only be destructive and harmful. I pose the following question: why does the sphere of human perception, with all its variability, have boundaries that necessarily incorporate the realm of unbearable pain, considering that this pain serves no useful function as in the case of the first type of pain? Acknowledging the inherent irresolvability of this inquiry, I propose some considerations on the meaning of the domain of perceiving unbearable pain as experienced by the human being.

1. In my mind, the problem of evil and suffering boils down to the problem of the meaning of pain. Pain can be classified as follows. Within the realm of human experience, it may manifest as physical or mental, and it can also possess either potential utility or lack thereof. Pain that is considered “useful” (albeit this potential may remain untapped) facilitates personal development and instructs individuals in navigating their surroundings. The primary role of pain, as viewed through the lens of evolutionary biology, is rooted in its educational utility.

2. Another differentiation that arises in the context of pain pertains to its categorization as either bearable or unbearable. I posit that the latter represents a form of pain devoid of potential utility, and can be defined as only destructive. It could tentatively be suggested that unbearable pain distinguishes itself by preventing the consciousness from distancing or dis-identifying itself from the experience both during and subsequent to its direct impact. I contend that pain with the capacity for utility is

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bearable, whereas unbearable pain is invariably destructive. This implies that unbearable pain lacks practical value as it fails to educate. Only the bearable pain is endowed with an educational function.

Thus the question that I pose in the context of theodicy: Why does unbearable pain exist?

3. Indeed, here is a domain of human perception/consciousness. This realm is expansive enough yet constrained and shaped distinctively for various species. Concerning the realm of perception, the boundaries of this domain diverge substantially between humans and animals, and the perceptual realms among different species of animals vary significantly as well.

4. The recent experience of the COVID-19 pandemic vividly demonstrated how biased, flexible, fickle, and limited the sphere of sensual perception is for us as human beings. What was considered delicious before infection often totally changed after the illness.

The problem with pain I see is that the very flexible and fickle configuration of the sphere of human perception, both sensual and mental, for unknown reasons includes, besides all other areas, the area of unbearable pain, and not solely the pain endowed with potential utility. But, the area of perception related to unbearable pain, when being actualized, only destroys the personality of its bearer. Hence, the presence of unbearable pain within our sensual framework, as well as other sentient beings, remains a perplexing conundrum.

6. For instance, it would have been conceivable to have such an arrangement of a living being as follows: initially experiencing pain which also holds potential utility, then progressing to a higher level of discomfort, yet not to the point of being unbearable, and ultimately, upon reaching a certain threshold, immediate death. Such an arrangement of a human being would lack the element of unbearable pain, useless for our existence and development. However, in reality, we possess a different structure, including this element within our sensory domain.

7. The concept of unbearable pain plays a significant role in Christian myth. Christian theology acknowledges the existence, among other forms of pain, of the realm of unbearable pain and asserts that God is well acquainted with it, being personally involved in such suffering. God knows this pain so deeply that, in the Incarnation, He Himself immersed into it, endured it, lived through it, and conquered it on the Cross. Thus, Christian theology acknowledges the very phenomenon of unbearable

pain and considers it crucial. However, in my view, Christian theology remains silent on the meaning of the presence of unbearable pain within the domain of human perception and of its origin. It does not explain why bearable pain would not suffice. This question remains a mystery.

8. However, further reflections and observations regarding the phenomenon of unbearable pain can be put forth.

Indeed, just as the realm of human perception encompasses, unclear why, an area of the unbearable, it also includes an area with an opposite sign, where the sensation of indescribable height and fullness becomes possible to experience. There seems to be a certain symmetry: the irrationally present sphere of unbearable pain within us, and a similarly irrationally bestowed opposite sphere. Therefore, one could reverse the thesis: if the latter exists, the sensation of indescribable fullness of being (caught up to the third heaven, as described by the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:17), then symmetrically, there must also be the former, the possibility of the opposite sphere of perception - the sphere of unbearable pain. It could be argued that God has structured the inner world of man in such a way that in addition to the normative sphere of perception, the givenness of which is rationally understandable, this sphere encompasses super-normative areas - the feeling of indescribable fullness of being and its opposite, the feeling of unbearable pain. However, experiencing unbearable pain within the confines of our current existence is much simpler than reaching the feeling of indescribable fullness of being.

9. There is another consideration: the sphere of unbearableness (physical and/or mental unbearable pain) into which one can fall is always implicitly present in our everyday existence. We do not often think directly about it, but instinctively we fear it with panic. This sphere of unbearableness, yet unmanifested but constantly threatening us, serves as the invisible horizon of our ordinary existence, a black hole within us that is not directly visible but always latently present in our inner world, centering it. The region of unbearableness is one of the power centers inside us that rules us and somehow affects the trajectory of our lives. Thus, if God cares about how the trajectories of human life unfold, this gives significance to the sphere of unbearableness as one of the power centers of the inner world and instincts influencing this trajectory.

10. Finally, I would say that the fact of positioning of us by God in the face of the imminent threat of unbearableness hints that our very existence and trajectories of our lives are not a game but are given to us



Dmitry Biriukov

seriously. Since the states presented to us of unbearable pain and its opposite, the state of ultimate fullness of life, are profoundly serious states.

Viktor Ilievski, *Plato's Theodicy: The Forgotten Fount*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2023, ISBN:978-90-04-67929-0.

Florin George Calian*

The reality of evil and the existence of God has long been a subject of philosophical and theological debate, presenting a logical inconsistency that challenges our understanding of the nature of deity. The problem of evil, in particular, has given rise to the *argument from evil*, one of the strongest arguments against God's existence or perfection. The book under review explores the types of answers to this rationale from Plato's philosophical perspective. According to Viktor Ilievski, Plato formulated a comprehensive response, comprising more than a few theodicean strategies. Plato's answers aimed to reconcile the coexistence of evil and God's omnibenevolence as being consistent in the same world.

With the exception of Plotinus,¹ the ancient philosophers did not write specific treatises addressing the nature of evil or providing justification for the goodness of God in the face of evil. However, according to Lactantius, a formulation of the problem of evil might have been developed by Epicurus. While there are serious arguments that cast doubt on whether Epicurus was truly committed to such an endeavour, the problem of evil was nonetheless tackled by Plato on several occasions as part of a more coherent theological program. As a theistic philosopher, Plato grappled with this problem in a relatively clear and articulate manner, in one of the earliest systematic efforts to vindicate the existence of an all-good and all-powerful deity. Thus theodicy was not a peripheral concern for Plato, but a dominant one. Plato's primary theodicy revolves around the idea that God, while benevolent, is not fully omnipotent. However, when examined more closely, Plato's solution reveals additional nuances and facets beyond this core formulation.

To prove his case, Ilievski displays in five chapters the key places where Plato debates in detail the inquiry into evil. In the first chapter, Ilievski points at *Republic* II, where Plato struggles with the theology of his time (the Homeric-Hesiodic one, where Gods dispense both good and evil, and consequently the divine engages in morally reprehensible actions). This represents the earliest documented idea in Western culture

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¹ See in the previous issue, *Religion and the Problem of Evil* (I), the article of Anne Sheppard and John Dillon, "Plotinus on Evil," *RES* 16 (1/2024): 114–20, DOI: 10.2478/ress-2024-0008.

that Gods are good and cause only good, and cannot be the source of evil. Especially 379b–c contains the first recorded justification of God’s goodness marking thus a kind of theological reform and the inauguration of theodicy, even if in a rudimentary form, as a philosophical discipline (p. 12, 36). This pushes back the origins of the theodicy tradition, considerably earlier than is typically acknowledged, which tends to trace it to the Stoics. Here Ilievski argues against those (such as Carlos Steel or John Hick) who explicitly affirm that Plato’s dialogues do not contain any theodicy. Although here the treatment of evil is merely anthropocentric (and political), I think Ilievski has a point since Plato openly absolves God of responsibility for any form of evil, pushing the charge towards human accountability.

In the second chapter, Ilievski undertakes a comprehensive analysis of *Republic X*, with particular attention to the Myth of Er. Ilievski’s purpose here is to demonstrate how Plato’s theodicy becomes more explicitly formulated, arguing that the Myth of Er represents Plato’s “Solution from Personal Responsibility”. While it is anachronistic to attribute the modern concept of free will to Plato (p.46), the myth operates with a similar idea. The stress is thus on the individual moral implications and accountability associated with one’s decision-making (αἵρεσις). Although the Gods provide the context and the choices, and seem to lack divine compassion and involvement in human affairs, it is up to each soul to select its path, and thus to be responsible for evil.

The third chapter, which is one of the most challenging, is dedicated to the Digression from *Theaetetus*, specifically concentrating on 176a5–8, in an attempt to emphasize the implications of a *metaphysics of evil*. Ilievski posits the presence of an “implicit theology.” Although the concept of the Good has its opposite, Plato exercises caution in affirming a metaphysical dualism, shown by his use of the atypical term ὑπεναντίον. Even though ὑπεναντίον is considered responsible for all evils, it is conceived at a lower and secondary level. Additionally, it is suggested that both ὑπεναντίον and ἀνάγκη are terms used by Plato to designate the same entity. Ilievski notes that the theodicy in *Theaetetus* is distinct compared to other theologies he analyses. This is because it does not exculpate God by identifying separate causes or reasons for evil. Instead, it focuses on the individual *sufferers* and the latent benefits of suffering (p. 111), a perspective known as the Irenaean type of theodicy.

The subsequent chapter naturally focuses on the *Timaeus*, as it is the primary text for initiating and potentially concluding an argument regarding the presence of evil in the world. Ilievski identifies three theodicean

tactics. The first, “the Principle of Plenitude”, attributes the existence of undesirable elements in the sensible world to the Paradigm rather than to God. The second theodicy, “the Solution from Personal Responsibility”, places the fault on the moral agent. The third, and most widely recognized theodicy concerning the origin of evil in the world, attributes the blame to the pre-existing material. The final chapter examines a relatively rarely discussed text, that of *Laws* X. Here, Ilievski considers the so-called aesthetic thesis, which posits that imperfections contribute to the overall beauty and perfection of the world.

Several of Plato’s theodicies presented in this book are logically pertinent, and there is more to be explored by scholars, philosophers, and theologians who struggle with the problem of evil. The reconciliation with God from these Platonic perspectives could reinforce theism from viewpoints that are prior to Christianity. As Ilievski put it, Plato’s arguments and claims constitute the *fount* for later theologies, which is not necessarily a surprise given that much of the history of philosophy and theology is a development and exploration of Plato’s initial surveys.

Overall, the chief merit of Ilievski’s meticulous research in this impressive book is to rehabilitate Plato as a theologian, filling a significant gap in Platonic scholarship. This demanding book must be an essential reference for any scholar of Plato and theodicy. It offers a fresh insight into Platonic theology, a subject that, surprisingly, is largely underexplored by Platonic scholarship. Additionally, the book includes an excellent list of references, a very useful *Index Locorum*, and an *Index Nominum*.

Rupert Shortt, *The Hardest Problem. God, Evil and Suffering*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2023, 130 p., ISBN: 978-1-3998-0271-0.

Otniel Vereş*

The problem of evil is admittedly one of the hardest challenges Christian theology must face. In fact, for many it acts almost as a difficulty test for any theological endeavor, the supreme test case for theological thought. This comes at least in part from the fact that, – to give just one example – no matter how complex or intellectually gratifying the controversies and discussions about the existence of God are, the problem of evil and suffering touches and affects us at a very personal level, going far beyond our urge for logical consistency and rationality. It is partly for this reason that, powerful as they may be, classical responses to the problem of evil almost always leave us with the feeling that something is still missing or escaping us. That is not of course to underestimate the force or need of this type of philosophical discourse, and there are excellent scholarly studies – Alvin Plantinga comes instantly to mind – that are a valuable resource for anyone wanting to tackle this problem at an academic level.

Yet one can feel the need for a fresh approach to this perennial question, one that can get beyond the often reductive answers that have been given, and that's exactly what Rupert Shortt's study offers us: a concise, humble, compassionate yet intellectually rigorous account, developing, in Shortt's words, "in a roundabout way", circling the central problem from different angles and perspectives, unapologetically intertwining insights drawn from theology, philosophy, science or literature.

The author's long experience in high quality journalism plays a major role in the way he handles what we can call "religion's weak flank", i.e., evil and suffering, providing us with an engaging, lively, and passionate read. Yet for all this lightness of style, Shortt demonstrates a solid handling of philosophical and theological sources.

This is not a dogmatic study of theodicy in any classical way, even if it succeeds in presenting us with an *apologia* of some of the classical church teachings, because in the end what we probably need today is not another "rationalistic" or philosophical explanation of evil, not another type of justifying discourse which tries to exonerate God for the moral predicament the world finds itself in, but a response that can give fresh credit to old beliefs in a manner that engages honestly with the full

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scope of our limitations as human beings. Shortt does not make any claim to give final explanations, guaranteed answers, to find easy meanings of evil and suffering. Instead, he opens ways to cope gracefully and credibly with adversities, suffering or meaningless evil, so that even if we cannot find anything meaningful in the pain and evil that surround us, we can still allow ourselves to be transformed into better persons. In this regard, Shortt commends Eleonore Stump's work *Wandering in Darkness* for taking on the problem of evil "at a psychological narrative level" (p. 15). This kind of narrative argument, or "narrative theodicy", as he calls it (p. 67), presents the important advantage of not having that sting of theological self-sufficiency which unfortunately blemishes many explanations of evil or suffering. They allow for people to better understand their individual contexts of life so that even if the abominable nature of suffering remains unchanged, they can at least get a better perspective over it.

I will not go into details regarding all the specific themes or topics that Rupert Shortt approaches in his book. Suffice to say that he touches upon many of the *loci communes* that one would expect when dealing with the question of evil. I mention but a few: the existence of God in relation to evil and suffering, the meaning of creation, atonement by crucifixion, the issue of universalism, providence, or eschatology, challenges to the goodness of God such as the famous one posed by Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov, etc. But, as I emphasized above, all this is done by pulling threads from many angles and perspectives of human knowledge, be they from philosophy, theology, science, literature, or psychology. Interesting and rewarding as seeing more closely how Shortt tangles with these topics may be, I think it would be of value to speak in more general terms about Shortt's approach, underlining those aspects that I find particularly telling.

The author doesn't delve directly into the subject. The qualification "directly" is important as it shows that the way he chooses to get started is of no small consequence for the topic of the book. In fact, of the four main chapters, the first two are, in the author's own words, "preparatory work in relation to our main theme" (p. 52). These chapters take on the subjects of chaos and meaning, and the old venerable reason versus faith debate. Why do these issues have so important a bearing – as preliminary work – on the topic of evil? Briefly put, because they offer the context in which we can properly and coherently speak about evil in relation to God's creation and goodness.

It is crucial to understand the contemporary intellectual context in which the problem of evil arises. It is a context that took roots in

the outbreak of the modern world in the XVI and XVII century along with the Reformation and the scientific revolution. Charles Taylor gave us a most competent and profound account of the tremendous changes that took place after 1500, in his acclaimed work *A Secular Age*. I mention only two aspects with a direct bearing on the problem of theodicy. Accompanying what Taylor has called the disenchantment of the world, the scientific revolution led in the end to an image of the universe which could be as far as possible from the one held previously. Whereas people thought they lived in a “cosmos”, a well-ordered world laden with meaning and values, they now found themselves immersed in a cold, vast universe, devoid of values or inner meaning. It was just the beginning of a process that finally – though not at all as easily as pop science likes to boast – ended by imposing naturalism and atheism as the default position for reasonable people. A massive change occurred also in the way people understood evil. As Taylor explained, until then the framework of significance was an understanding of suffering as punishment, or an act of pedagogy or penitence from God. But that framework collapsed bit by bit as the anthropocentric shift gained firmer and firmer acceptance.

I find all of this particularly significant for any rigorous discussion on evil. In the first place, we can demand a sense of suffering, or be indignant toward evil only in a universe that has meaning, because otherwise it would be of no use. We get angry at seemingly pointless suffering and at the wickedness of human beings only because we relate ourselves to them or expect life to have meaning. It is of no avail to revolt against evil’s lack of meaning in a universe that we believe to be void of any meaning or goal at all. In the same vein, it is useless to point out God’s cruelty or lack of power unless we accept the possibility of God. You cannot rage at a God you don’t believe in. As Shortt poignantly underlines, many find in evil a confirmation of their preexisting atheistic beliefs. We might add that in this case the whole problem of evil gains the appearance of a mere rhetorical technique.

Enough has been said to get the idea that in order to talk with sense about evil we must have a substantive understanding of the larger framework in which we operate: does the universe have any meaning or goal at all? Is the existence of God possible and how do we understand God in relation to his creation?

Chapters three and four directly confront the problem of evil, building on the foundation laid in the first chapters. Shortt deals with the divine action and intervention in the world, divine causality, the question of

prayer, suffering and different levels of evil: evil suffered and evil inflicted or performed, and finally atonement and providence. Drawing on David Bentley Hart's *That All Shall be Saved*, Shortt links the moral destiny of creation to the moral nature of God himself. He stresses that "the explanation of evil in a universe created by a good and all-powerful creator must be sought eschatologically" (p. 74) and does not hesitate to describe himself as a "hopeful universalist" (p. 76). But again, Shortt humbly appeals to the provisional character of our answers. Admitting that evil is a mystery we must live with, Shortt emphasizes that "there is no theology capable of taking away the sting of suffering" (p. 80), no analytic solution or rational argumentation that can dissipate the clouds of evil. Therefore, what people can do is to emulate the example of the monk Zosima from *The Brothers Karamazov*, whose response to the challenge was "moral and existential rather than abstract (...) radical compassion" (p. 79). Instead of giving intricate theological solutions, what we can do for people in suffering is to serve them with our presence amidst their afflictions.

The question of atonement and providence is of great importance for the theme of the book, functioning as a key to a better – though still partial – understanding of the mystery of evil. No talk about evil or suffering can eschew what stays at the heart of Christian faith: the Crucifixion, the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of the world. This conviction "matters fundamentally to a Christian engagement with evil and suffering" (p. 85). Shortt acknowledges that the doctrine of atonement, with its emphasis on Christ's suffering and death for mankind, is hard to swallow in our contemporary intellectual milieu. This reminds us of Taylor's similar contention that "gratitude at the suffering and sacrifice of Christ seems incomprehensible, or even repellent and frightening to many" (*A Secular Age*, p. 650), but for all that, Christianity is inconceivable without sacrifice and Crucifixion cannot be reduced to an accident or second-rate teaching that can be sidelined in order not to interfere with our modern sensibilities. The kind of response to evil that Stump or Dostoyevsky, through monk Zosima, talked about can be performed, and gets meaning only in the light of Christ's suffering.

Finally, one more step must be made, otherwise all our journey so far would come to a sudden and unsatisfactory stop. As Shortt says, "faith usually goes hand in hand with a belief in providence" (p. 107). History as we witness and experience it appears devoid of any meaning, littered with cruelty, wickedness, and suffering. Christian faith cannot give a definitive solution here and now to all this senseless evil in the world. It is bound

to point – through a “still-to-be-realized eschatology” – to a time when in hindsight things will get a better perspective. To have a cogent and powerful answer, Christian theology needs to display coherence. Hence, the importance of eschatology. In the end, evil cannot be fully vindicated in this part of history. All the parts will be drawn together eschatologically.

Rupert Shortt’s book will establish itself as a classic book on the problem of evil, both by its fresh approach and depth of insight despite its size. It is not within everybody’s reach to say so much – and no less on the problem of evil – in such a concise and condensed form. Will it be convincing to nonbelievers? Or in the end will it just assist believers in strengthening their already held convictions?

As for the first question, no satisfactory answer can be given for someone who doesn’t believe in a meaning of the universe and life however dim that could be, or who is not willing to accept the possibility of God. To express this according to the economy of the book, no chapters three and four without chapters one and two. It is an act almost of perversity or dishonesty to ask for sense and meaning in a world you declare to be meaningless. Shortt’s work makes clear the importance of conducting the discussion in terms proper to the subject. If we expect honest answers from Christian theology, we should at least make the effort to understand what it says in its specific and right form, before rejecting it, otherwise we would just be dismissing a strawman.

In regards to the second question, Shortt’s work is a beautiful reminder that classical or orthodox Christianity – despite human limitations that make its theological pronouncements provisional and tentative – continues to display valuable resources and answers for our world of grief and when confronted with great challenges. Especially important is the personal character of God. The problem of evil gets another perspective in this view, as opposed to Deism or other impersonal definitions of Divinity. Human beings are flesh and blood, so they need comforting, presence, meaning, and goals. Our condition as frail human beings living in a world that looks cold, meaningless, and inhospitable is precisely what gives Christian answers more substance and coherence than exclusive humanist or naturalist alternatives. But, then again, this is of course a matter of faith.

Mihaela Gligor and Elisabetta Marino, eds., *Tagore beyond Borders. Essays on His Influence and Cultural Legacy*, London – New York: Routledge, 2023, 151p., ISBN: 978-1-032-11208-4 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-032-13334-8 (pbk), ISBN: 978-1-003-22874-5 (ebk), DOI: 10.4324/9781003228745.

Raluca Lazarovici Vereş*

The name of the vast and complex personality of Rabindranath Tagore and the word “border” seem almost oxymoronic. Any kind of limit or attempt to limit it is disregarded in a natural and massive overflowing of any restraint or obstacle. As a human, Tagore belongs equally to the 19th century, as he was born in 1861, and to the 20th, as he passed away in 1941. At the midpoint of his life, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1913), becoming the first Asian Nobel Laureate. Writings of all kinds have never ceased to accumulate regarding his works and personality and they seem to be an inexhaustible source of inspiration for scholars and the large public.

What this remarkable collection of essays brings is a fresh view on Tagore’s figure as a whole. For over a century scholars and researchers from different cultures and domains have recomposed Tagore’s figure into a new and original perspective. What could be noted is the passion of this collective international and interdisciplinary work team, made up of ten women researchers out of eleven. The editors, Mihaela Gligor, from the Romanian Academy in Cluj-Napoca, and Elisabeta Marino, from the University of Rome “Tor Vergata”, courageously brought to light sparkling glimpses of the immense legacy that Tagore continues to perpetuate today in an ever changing and challenging world culture.

The title contains *in nuce* a nuance and at the same time a promise that only a contemporary consumer of culture can benefit from enclosed in the word “influence”, which for the international reader is inevitably associated with what today can constitute the professionalized and much sought-after figure of the social media “influencer”. We can assume that what influencers are today was represented on an entirely different scale in terms of content quality by exotic and complex figures like Tagore, who emerged from the restless and deep waves of a Bengali

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culture quasi-unknown to the Western world, all the more so as it was dominated by British colonial civilization.

We suppose he wasn't the only one of his kind in his historical context, but he was certainly the only one who managed to transcend his limits, cultural determinisms and boundaries: another well-chosen word present in the title – "border". To capture in a given historical moment Tagore's personality and his influences on universal culture, the most appropriate word is therefore enclosed in the concept of "beyondness". Any attempt to stabilize his legacy in time and space must therefore be sought "beyond", in unbounded time and space into an unhindered realm. These unlimited possibilities make the traces Tagore leaves behind across time and human civilization not only multiple and fluidly spread, but also inexhaustible, in a continuous and autonomous mechanism of self-regeneration, utterly versatile whatever the cultural and historical context may be.

This seems to be the key to reading this volume, making it one of the most adapted to today's needs and interests on the matter of the scientific community. The accent on his fervid and dynamic life, rather unusual for his times, is one of the meanings of his going *beyond* "narrow domestic walls", not only by the universality of his works, but in the most concrete way, as an almost adventurous traveller, which enriched and added value to his personality.

The editors' aim is explicitly offered in an essential *Introduction* as that of celebrating Tagore's genius and his complex life. "His songs (*Rabindrasangeet*) were linked to his paintings, his plays to the arts of spectacle, his poetry to his drama, his life to his philosophy, his personal beliefs to Indian religions and traditions, and his existence to his Shantiniketan School." (p. 1) "The hallmark of his genius is that his works transcend the barriers of time, geography, language, and cultures," (p. 1) and this is exactly the purpose of this volume which "brings together researchers of Tagore's life and passionate readers of his works." (p. 1)

The first chapter, "Cultural Transfer, Rabindranath Tagore's Travels and Travel Writing", by Fakrul Alam, from the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, deals with Tagore and Cultural Translation and Transformation very much aware of the cultural transfers embodied in Tagore's life and works, bearing across the world the importance of fluid cultural values: "Transforming the arts and crafts of his people, as well as his own work, was among his priorities." (p. 5) In a subchapter, Fakrul Alam pertinently brought to light "Some Theoretical Considerations About Cultural Translation" underlying the "cultural transfer" transcending "national and

language boundaries” and its inherent power of “intercultural transformation” that is “how texts were not just linguistically but also culturally transformed during their travels” (p. 7) and how they would be adapted to local contexts. Like Stockhorst,¹ he sees this as “the triumph of an approach to translation allowing changes to the original therefore favouring the target culture”. (p. 7) The author underlines “Tagore’s attempt to recapture in English the mood that led to some of his best poetry and led him to adopt «domesticating» strategies for them. He wanted to find a way of representing his thoughts and feelings that involved transferring the linguistic and cultural elements of the original works into English from the Bengali.” (p. 8) Tagore’s endeavours of “cultural translation as hybridization”, bridge-building, not as diasporic, but unconditioned transposition of a text across cultures and languages, and eventually and if needed, even genres, were utterly successful. “The English *Gitanjali* poems were received with almost universal praise immediately after their publication, and have clearly succeeded spectacularly as unique translations.” (p. 9) As a matter of fact, they brought him a Nobel Prize for Literature.

Alam looks deeper into Tagore’s complex personality. He describes Tagore’s pan-Indian cultural research and vision, his thoughts upon Western civilization which he considered dynamic and fertilizing for the old but rather static Eastern, deepened into a cultural kind of inertia and the necessity of the constant cross-fertilization between East and West. He imagined therefore a place where such fertile exchanges can take place: the Visva-Bharati University, continuing the Shantiniketan School project, envisioned as a “Site of Cultural Transfer and Cultural Translation”, a place for *Maitri*, that is “universal sympathy, both intellectual and emotional” and where a “great universal culture of the mind” is possible, a “locus of enlightened thought and cultural transformation” (p. 17) in opposition to the cataclysmic war which could be foreseen at the end of the thirties.

“The Travelling Fictions. The English Stories of Rabindranath Tagore”, the second chapter of the volume, written by Radha Chakravarty, from Ambedkar University Delhi, praised writer, critic, and translator, brings to light some of Tagore’s short fiction as a pioneer of the genre in Bengali where he left a lasting influence. Considered among the most relevant, “the stories enact multiple border crossings, at cultural, historical, social,

¹ Stefanie Stockhorst, *Cultural Transfer Through Translation: The Circulation of Enlightened Thought in Europe by Means of Translation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010).

psychological, linguistic and literary levels” characterized by “their location in-between cultures, geographies, histories and literary traditions”. (p. 22) Accordingly, “they also problematize the popular Western stereotype of Tagore as the mystical prophet from the East and his sanctified image in Bengal as the revered «Gurdev»”, (p. 22) which is another recurrent theme especially among the Bengali authors of this volume.

The chapter adds some relevant and little-known details of his life as a short story author: “Tagore’s first Bengali story, “Bhikharini” (“The Beggar Woman”), was published in 1877, when he was only sixteen, and his last was a draft dictated from his deathbed in 1941. But it was from 1891 onward that he really began to experiment with the form, when he was sent to manage the family estates in East Bengal, living on a boat on the river Padma. [...] Tagore began to produce narratives inspired by the everyday joys and sorrows of ordinary people, initiating the democratization of Bengali fiction” (p. 23) introducing new elements to the genre originating in his eclectic upbringing, the heterogeneous literary traditions, myth, folklore, history, classical literature, nature, politics and personal experience.

Quantitatively, according to the author, Tagore’s writings run to more than 3,200 pages and comprise poetry, fiction, plays, essays, lectures, letters and other miscellaneous works. Many are translations and rewritings of his Bengali texts. Some are collaborative translations. In these works his philosophy and mysticism are embedded, therefore the author considers that the re-popularization and study of his artistic work would help raise social awareness and balance the widely spread one-dimensional stereotypes of Tagore abroad and in India as “mystic poet” or “Wise man from the East”, isolated from the immediate reality. His activism through his texts targets and spreads his theories against male-dominated society, the lifeless education system ridiculously focused on the practice of learning by rote, the social hypocrisy against the “Untouchable”, the narrowness of militant nationalism and the sterility of tradition if kept unfertilized by the new.

As in the previous chapter, the author touches the sensitive theme of self-translation and “domestication” of his works to the English language in order to reach the universal reader. It seems that despite what it is commonly known according to which he decided to translate his own words because he was not satisfied with previous translations made by others, he was just as unhappy and insecure of his own work. “Tagore’s anxieties about his own command of the English language, the responses of his

foreign readers and the dilution of local nuances in his self-translations into English" (p. 29) made him feel the disjunction between regional and international like an open sore. He falls into despair regarding the quality of his final artistic production in any other language, due to the untranslatable character of his works and he feels he is forced to simplify to the bone and to even abridge his original texts, getting a poor result with "cracks and gaps". He says: "In my translation I timidly avoid all difficulties", and even "I know I am misrepresenting myself... to the Western reader", and finally and desperately admits that "I have done gross injustice to my original productions partly owing to my incompetence and partly to carelessness". (p. 29) It almost seems he gets the Nobel Prize not for his literature, but against it!

Indeed, such texts demand an intercultural approach by the reader and find their way through the universal consciousness into "World Literature" by mixing local and foreign ingredients, moving freely in the vast and intricate territory of arts syncretism and transcreation as public domain, cherishing the absolute freedom of linguistic and cultural transposition into a space of intercultural dialogue.

"The Transnational Solidarity and Cultural Appropriation as Parallelism between DuBois and Tagore" is the title of a more historical and descriptive fourth chapter written by Elisabetta Marino. The declared intention of the author is to shed light on the complex relationship between Rabindranath Tagore and W.E.B. Du Bois, an African American sociologist, civil rights activist, historian, teacher, and one of the founding members of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), established in 1909. She sets the focus on skin colour and the race problem, even if differently articulated, and the evolution into a post-national cosmopolitanism of both activists. After receiving the Nobel Prize in 1913, Tagore travelled all over the world giving lectures and meeting his public. "The Cult of Nationalism was among the speeches in his repertoire: his ideas on the limits of nationalism and his advocacy for cosmopolitanism began to circulate widely in the United States, possibly reaching Du Bois and other intellectuals. [...] His anti-militarism and harsh critique of nationalism stirred a torrent of unfavourable reactions." (p. 36) The author also cited an embarrassing diplomatic incident which saw Tagore as a direct victim of the Immigration Quota Act implemented in the US in 1924 against nonwhites coming from Asia.

Apparently, Du Bois had similar interests as Tagore, since in his seminal "Address to the Nations of the World" delivered during the first

Pan-African Conference held in London, in July 1900, he stated that “the problem of the twentieth century [was] the problem of the colour line” looking up to India as an “anti-colonial example, a herald of modern politics”, and at the same time presenting the analogy between British imperialism and American racist oppression. Accordingly, in his view, “the colonized subjects of the Raj and African Americans were fellow «coloured» peoples struggling against white supremacy.” (p. 37)

Another analogy Marino makes is the system of caste as used in the public discourse by both militants fighting for equal racial rights, but with different aims. “His [Du Bois’] detailed description of the practices of segregation was meant to present «a true picture of the caste situation in the United States»”, a statement where caste stands as a synonym for racial discrimination. Tagore himself often associated caste and race, when delving into the problems of American society. (p. 38) Nevertheless, Marino draws attention to the instrumentalization and manipulation of Tagore’s works and ideas, especially after his death. Whereas Tagore distances himself from nationalism, there were cases like that of Lajpat Rai, a friend of Du Bois, who, by means of clever selections of his works, tried to manipulate the context when presenting Tagore as a “fervent and zealous patriot [...], overlooking his large body of anti-nationalist writings. Hence, far from being a cosmopolitan humanist, the champion of religious and intellectual freedom, Tagore was fetishistically featured in *Young India* as a living embodiment of Indian national identity”. (p. 38) Furthermore, Du Bois himself used Tagore’s figure as a “great, new voice representing the coloured races” as a sharp instrument to fight his ideological and political battle and, as Marino shows, Du Bois successfully continued doing that in public discourses even after Tagore’s death.

The conclusion of Elisabetta Marino’s chapter is that there is no doubt Tagore exercised a “pivotal and enduring influence” on Du Bois, but their ideas and militancy were not always aligned. On the contrary, they often gave different meanings to similar concepts. Such research clearly shows the importance of reconstructing human relationships in the cultural history of ideas.

Eleonora Olivia Bălănescu, from the University of Craiova, brings forward another aspect of the multifaceted and “Krishna-like” portrayal of Tagore: that of the methodist for alternative teaching. Tagore’s “Educational Paradigm and Its Relevance to Modern Teaching” might be one of the most relevant chapters of the volume, as the theme of education has never ceased to be considered of utmost importance at all

times, and probably even more today, due to the over technologized and somehow environmentally artificial era children are forced to study in. As Bălănescu shows, Tagore is an ardent supporter not only theoretically, but also in the most pragmatic way, and active promoter of contact with nature (guided-)education, far from the “classical” rigid-ruled system, with learning by rote methods, which very much dominated 19th and the 20th century education all over the world.

Bălănescu presented some facts regarding the experimental school that Tagore founded at Shantiniketan (“abode of peace”): “Established in 1901 in Bengal’s rural area, on a property that his [Tagore’s] father had bought with the aim of turning it into a place of meditation and prayer, Shantiniketan is the living proof of Tagore’s vision of a school located in the heart of nature, where students could learn in the open air, freed from the physical and emotional confines of formal classrooms. After 18 years, this institution grew into a university, Visva-Bharati [Communion of the World with India], as a logical progression in Tagore’s philosophy of education. The motto that he chose for the university – *There Where the Whole World Unites in a Nest* – reveals his project of an academic curriculum that would blend India’s huge cultural heritage with the knowledge of the West.” (p. 49)

Actually, the three educational establishments that Tagore founded – Shantiniketan School, Visva-Bharati University and Sriniketan campus – represent as so many phases of Tagore’s educational view or rather “philosophy” of education which he expressed in writings and talks on the matter all over the globe. Tagore openly admitted his resentment of textbooks, as unable to fully develop the child’s intellect and soul and to guide him to fulfil his physical and emotional needs, to discover the world’s treasures, inner values, and a sense of life as a well-rounded person. School is seen as sheer “calamity” against which “child-nature protests with all its power of suffering, subdued at last into silence by punishment”. (p. 51) He saw the Indian school as a trivial “education factory, lifeless, colourless, and dissociated from the context of the universe” and, continues Bălănescu, “which used discipline to repress children’s delight in expressing their God-given gift of enjoying the world”. Education in the classroom makes “children sit like museum specimens, deprived of their natural freedom, isolated from real life and forced to feed their mind on unbearable lessons”. (p. 51)

Tagore’s clearest opinion upon the matter is that conventional schooling is nothing other than “One of man’s most cruel and wasteful mistakes”. Bălănescu also encapsulates in a phrase Tagore’s idea on where a proper education should take place, like in an *ashram*, a free open-air

school in old India, where “Freedom was considered an essential aspect of education because it gave children the possibility to learn subconsciously and intuitively, to take initiative and ultimately to become more independent and self-reliant” (p. 51) in close contact with nature where nature itself is the best teacher.

Bălănescu makes reference to the Romanian poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga, whose approach to life is also an intuitive, and not a rational one, able if not to fully understand, at least to get closer to the mystery of God’s own handiwork and innermost truth. This mystical approach to education is dogma-free, with no imposed curriculum, or religious teaching whatsoever, as “that was part of students’ daily life in a place governed by devotion and intimate communion with God: «It[religion] is the truth of our complete being, the consciousness of our personal relationship with the infinite; it is the true centre of gravity of our life.»” (p. 53) This type of education also implies labour done within the community, meant to reveal the “true freedom of mind” derived from “the sympathy for nature and service for man”, a superior type of awareness which opens the door to an “even higher freedom, a freedom from all racial and national prejudice”. (p. 58)

Conclusively, the right answer to “What is a teacher for?” would be: “to help learners learn;” that is, to create “the conditions in which they might be able to learn”, (p. 57) to develop skills like problem solving and values like critical thinking, self-sacrifice, team spirit and resilience, as well as to refine the instruments for reaching freedom and individual enlightenment together with spiritual unity with mankind, and last but not least, love and kinship with nature with pro-environmental behaviour. Even if the general tone of the chapter led the reader to Bălănescu’s silent criticism against formal educational systems around the world, while favouring Tagore’s, the final word is a positive and encouraging one: “Modern school curricula also integrate subjects and activities designed to cater to students’ spiritual needs. Although education systems continue to prioritize knowledge acquisition and assessment, there are classes, such as art, music and drama, which encourage learners’ self-expression in various creative fields.” (p. 55)

Additional revelatory research belongs to Uma Das Gupta, historian and Tagore biographer. It describes and analyses the relationship and the kinship between two Indian figures who were giants of human civilization, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi Her research is based principally on the exchange of letters from 1912 to 1940, but

also involves a third figure, that of Charles Freer Andrews, “an Anglican priest and Christian missionary who came to India in 1904 to teach at St. Stephen’s College in Delhi.” (p. 65) “He became a close friend of Tagore and Gandhi and decided to leave his missionary position and move permanently to teach in the Shantiniketan School, which Tagore had founded in 1901 for an alternative education. But with a turn of events in December 1913, Andrews went to South Africa to help in Gandhi’s work at Gokhale’s request and with Tagore’s support.” (p. 65)

The “Background Thoughts” regarding pursuing and attaining the final goal of the country’s freedom from being a subdued colony, were a surprising alternative to the usual universally known fight back tactic was: that of “*ahimsa*” towards the opponent, that is a withdrawal in the face of any kind of violence, no hate, nor physical or psychological harm against another human not even against the worst enemy, even if that would imply self-suffering and self-sacrifice. As Tagore wrote to Andrews, “We have to build a seat for the one God revealed to all human races standing in the heart of this struggle”. (p. 64) Das Gupta underlines that “their ideals for independence were made of a fearless courage in the face of temporal power, and a deep empathy for all men” (p. 64) in the spirit of *ahimsa* as the state of self-purification and perfect love for any human being. Gandhi asserted: “An intellectual acceptance of the existence of God does not make one a believer. To believe in God but not to love people is a contradiction in terms. Faith implies truth and love” (p. 65) – of any person, as a very image and creation of God.

In comparison with the Du Bois / Tagore tandem of ideas described in a previous chapter in this volume, the Tagore / Gandhi example reflects a much higher level of achieving equality and the brotherhood of men. As Das Gupta concludes, if one looks beyond the myths and legends that have surrounded such iconic personalities as Gandhi and Tagore, whose biographies and hagiographies have turned them into superhuman beings, one would surprisingly find deep agony concerning the problems of their times and debates and actions on extremely tangible matters far from the accepted sanctity of their portrayals. Their everyday vulnerability as humans subjected to others’ and to their own scrutiny seems so far away from the purity of their heart and peace of mind. Nevertheless, History has justified their legacy and what Das Gupta suggests is that they gained their places among the most iconic figures of all times by perseverance, faith, and life and death struggles boldly undertaken till the very end.

The seventh chapter of the volume, written by Mihaela Gligor, deals with the philosophical and religious beliefs of Tagore, a *sui-generis*

syncretism blended into "The Mysterious Inner World", as suggestively designated by the author. Gligor makes some "Remarks on Representation of Religion in Rabindranath Tagore's *Sādhana*, and *The Religion of Man*" and gives the reader a tantalizing glimpse into Tagore's own "infinity". Gligor finds Tagore's religion "warm, human, and emotional" and she considers it, along with Amartya Sen, to be also strong and consistent, in direct connection to the tragic events, like the sudden death of his wife and of some of his children, that marked his human existence and made him deeply devoted to God. There are no gaps or boundaries between Tagore's works and his spiritual life; they are communicating vessels, only with different accents and nuances. On this principle, Gligor writes: "If *Gitanjali* contains the best of what the poet Tagore could offer, we can say without reservation that *Sādhana* is the most complete testament of the prophet Rabindranath Tagore. *Gitanjali* and *Sādhana* were written in a time of maximum artistic evolution." (p. 76) "*Gitanjali* spoke about love, faith, nature, and it revealed the inner universe of Tagore as a poet." (p. 77) At the same time, "in *Sādhana*, Tagore explored in detail the fundamental harmony of existence, as he had seen it, as a poet. Thus, *Sādhana* can be considered the basis of his vision of the world, as well as a starting point in life, which served as a frame of reference for his artistic creation, the world of his art." (p. 77) Art and religion are different expressions of the same meaning, as Tagore himself admits: "To me the verses of *Upanishads* and the teachings of Buddha have ever been things of the spirit and therefore endowed with boundless vital growth; and I have used them, both in my own life and in my preaching". (p. 77) Tagore's attitude towards religion and arts is that of a Rishi, a religious poet, as he asserted, more than once: "My religion is essentially a poet's religion." (p. 80)

Religion seen as a spiritual experience, away from dry dogmas caused Tagore to be seen as "a mystic *par excellence*", Gligor writes. "The essays of *Sādhana* expressed a point of view through which man reached the faith, and this made it possible for him to lead a perfect life [...] a great book of life as it is seen, experienced, and lived by the poet." (p. 77) His views on religion and its unity with the arts were described in *The Religion of Man*, a collection "which comprises the Hibbert Lectures delivered in Oxford, at Manchester College, during the month of May 1930", and is quoted by Gligor: "My religion is a poet's religion, and neither that of an orthodox man of piety nor that of a theologian. Its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channel as does the inspiration of my songs. My religious life has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has

my poetical life". (p. 80) He also declares that his mystical thoughts were very much influenced by the Bauls of Bengal, a sect of wandering village singers, living a simple obscure life, with no temples, no rituals, nor traditions, no norms either, but just spontaneous inspiration which mixed street arts and devotion to an unseen and unrepresented God, envisioned as a cosmic force which enables the manifestation of *dharmā*, the "truth of the Eternal Man".

But what exactly is essential to Tagore as a religious man? The answer is "man in communion with God, through ritual, devotion, and contemplation", (p. 78) as Gligor summarizes. "The achievement of an existence in which man coexists on the same level with divinity was the purpose of the religion for which Tagore militated." (p. 78) These instruments of the religious man: ritual, devotion and contemplation, as mentioned, give the mortal man the possibility to go "beyond borders" into the "real", which is the truth, and escape the manifestation of the tangible, which is deceit, and therefore, the very cause of deception. Religion as seen in *Sādhana* is very much linked to everyday life and the historical and cultural context. "The real misery of man lies in the fact that he cannot really go out of himself. He must free himself from this slavery of ignorance. This is the concentrated message of the Buddha's teachings, the wisdom of the Upanishads, or the Vedic poets, and also the message of Jesus, to which Tagore referred, and emphasized the need to put aside pride in the knowledge of the soul and of the self", (p. 79) Gligor writes. The Chapter concludes with some inspired lines from Tagore's last poem from *Gitanjali*, in which the direct speech to the Universal Spirit shows a personal relationship with the Unseen and the Almighty with an almost Christian touch and dimension of a prayer: "In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet... let my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee." (p. 83)

Digging into the depth of Tagore's eclectic and nevertheless coherent expression, inevitably one finds the "Mukti" concept, life-transforming freedom. Halina Markewicz, from the Jagiellonian University, Kraków, whose research focuses on Indian Literatures, Indian Philosophy and Religions, and the History of Oriental Studies, quotes Tagore in the title of her 8th chapter of the book: "All broken truths are evil". Freedom can be found in truth. The joy of the real and freedom of mind which man can achieve is the main focus of this essay. The opposite is greed and the supreme desire to fool oneself and the others, and thus become *ātmahanojanāh*, "spiritual suicides" that lost their freedom and ignore the

art of living. Once again, aesthetics and metaphysics, but also ethics are blended together in the essence of Mukti.

Tagore seems to raise the aesthetic experience to the level of the mystic “unity of truth” affirms Markewicz, and she continues “the experience of the highest aesthetic pleasure of an individual viewer intensifies and strengthens as a result of the synergy of experiences of all individual recipients, and at the same time reaches the level of a transpersonal, abstract essence of aesthetic experience, from which all subjective conditions are eliminated. It is thanks to this mechanism that individual consciousness « expands », and co-creates, together with others, transpersonal, essential, and thus common awareness of all participants of the event”. (p. 92) If the aesthetic experience and the truth become inseparable and if they belong to the same field of understanding and if art experience is not separate from life itself, therefore very much connected to ethics, then the religious man embodies at the same time the sage and the priest, the poet and the philosopher altogether and interdependently is able to reach the level of “disinterested joy” as the highest form of freedom of mind. On the other hand, if this is good and God, at the same time, any broken, incomplete, distorted truth is the opposite or the negation of truth, the un-truth, the un-real that is evil by default. Markewicz also presents what Tagore proposes as “pairs of opposites”: knowledge and ignorance, finite and infinite as a *coincidentia oppositorum*, coincidence of opposites. “In the classical Advaita Vedānta *avidyā*, ignorance is what makes emancipation impossible. Ignorance is an a priori epistemic mistake of superimposing (*adhyāsa*) the unreal upon the real” (p. 93). Therefore, she concludes, in Tagore’s view, “evil is not to be found in the world, but in broken or half-truths of man about the world”. (p. 94)

The following two chapters of the book are interconnected and deal with the presence of women and women’s voices in Tagore’s literature, the 9th chapter, in poetry – a postcolonial perspective, while the 10th chapter, in the short story *The Laboratory* (1940). This is a major theme to remain innovative and actual at different times. The 9th chapter is an essay written by Bashabi Fraser, from Edinburgh’s Napier University. It focuses on “The subaltern position of women, their familial and social silencing [...] in private and public spaces in postcolonial terms”, (p. 98) the female protagonists in selected poems by Rabindranath Tagore in his collection, *Punascha* (*Postscript*) contextualized in the familiar Bengali world. The marginalized voices are moved from the periphery to the centre of poetic expression, a sign of utter modernity, echoing Tagore’s concern relating to

women's position in the world. The close and careful exegetics of literary fragments of Tagore offers the possibility of entering into Tagore's artistic and ethical world, to better understand his view over the tangible world he lived in, where women, still needed an external voice to speak on their behalf from an alienated universe parallel to the male-dominated world which was then considered as relevant and worthy.

The discourse on women is completed by Paromita Mukherjee, from Amity University Kolkata. Here the character Sohini, who embodies feminine power, challenges and succeeds in changing tradition, and goes beyond what the society she accidentally was born in offered her – the status of a lover, wife and mother. As the author characterizes it, "Sohini is a rare combination of strength, intellect, shrewdness, and feminine guiles", at the same time "she has an unwavering devotion to her late husband's dream". (p. 111) Mukherjee affirms that the late Tagore's artistic creation stirred serious debates among exegetes and readers, as such a combination of feminine force was unheard of, or maybe considered unsuitable for the Punjabi woman stereotype, with those elements of strangeness, even foreignness. "Through Sohini, Tagore has created a model that breaks the barriers of caste, language, class, and religion and strikes a perfect balance between intellect and emotion", (p. 112) says the author considering, just as Julia Kristeva affirms in *Strangers to Ourselves*, that people find it problematic to accept or welcome strangers because they themselves are unable to accept their own strangeness. Sohini is not the Indian woman of Tagore's times, but rather the future woman that Tagore envisages for his own country, and projects beyond borders, into the universal and modern womanhood. But this construct is not easy to achieve in a patriarchal universe like the Bengali one, where women themselves are the carriers of tradition. Reforms and the new freedom are made and destined for men. The only hope for women relies in the very thin and fragile layer of middle-class, educated women. Besides, it seems that "pure womanhood" is challenged in this text, offering instead the mirage of the "new woman". The dual and seriously divided traditional Indian world made up of opposites such as private and public, inner and outer, material and spiritual, female and male, meets a huge challenge here.

The fight for freedom and the nationalistic movement slowed down the emancipation of women, as the British colonists were considered a menace to the traditional Indian way of being in the world, which had a specific and inflexible place for women. Therefore, it was not an easy task to "incorporate women's struggle for emancipation into the nation's struggle for independence". (p. 114) While the bourgeois emancipation

was against the system of “caste, polytheism, idolatry, animism, purdah, child-marriage, sati and more, seeing them as elements of a “pre-modern” or primitive identity”, (p. 114) the fervid nationalistic feelings that animated India in the late 19th century struggled to bring India to a *status quo ante* British occupation and to its traditional values. Tagore himself, over decades, transformed his view about women. The female identity found in this last short story shows an extraordinary evolution, alongside the history of his nation itself, towards the New Age.

The last chapter of the book is “Cinematographic Adaptations of Rabindranath Tagore’s Short Stories – Between Reality, Lyricism and Visual Poetry”, written by Daniela Rogobete, from the University of Craiova. She focuses on the visual aspects of Tagore’s artistic works, starting with the short stories, with their “exquisite imagery, narrative technique and lyricism”, which has been already described as difficult to translate. Cinematography seems therefore a much better way to “translate” into images and gestures what different languages were not able to transfer from one to another, a less intrusive technique of “domestication” of the texts. Rogobete introduces such techniques: “Translation”, “Transcreation”, “Transposition”, closing this volume in a circular fashion, back to its initial and recurrent major theme: Tagore as a unique, untranslatable genius, but still very much a generous spirit whose wisdom and artistic seeds are spread all over the world. “A poem”, Tagore claims in an interview given in 1916, “cannot be translated, it can only be relived in a different atmosphere.” (p. 127)

Rogobete’s opinion is that “if English translations often failed to do justice to Tagore’s impressive short fiction, if there was always something inevitably lost in translation, then there must have been a fair chance this “something” might be restored and recuperated through images”. (p. 128) She analyses the three most important adaptations of *Kabuliwala* (1957; 1961; 2017) a highly representative work of Tagore, “a deeply lyrical and profound ethical short fiction”. (p. 134) Tagore was a fervent cinema lover and was fascinated by the infinite possibilities this medium could offer, above all by the self-sufficiency of cinematographic techniques. His works of arts inspired generations of film directors and producers who transposed his works. “The first adaptation of one of his stories was filmed in 1923 (*Manbhanjan*) whereas the 1932 *Natir Puja* remains the only cinematographic production of his 1926 dance-drama, with Tagore himself as a director.” (p. 128) The vitality of Tagore’s works is emphasized by flourishing cinematographic adaptations even after his death. “Hungry Stones” (as Kshudhita Pashan, 1960, dir. by Tapan Sinha, in Bengali;

Lekin, 1991, dir. by Gulzar, in Hindi), “The Postmaster” (Teen Kanya, 1961, dir. by Satyajit Ray; Postmaster, 2016, dir. by Srijon Bardhan), “Kabuliwala” (adapted for screen in 1957 and directed by Tapan Sinha, in Bengali; in 1961, Bimal Roy, in Hindi; in 2017, Deb Medhekar, in Hindi). Many of Tagore’s short stories were adapted for TV in serialized forms and broadcast in India such as the 26-episode show Stories by Rabindranath Tagore broadcast in 2015 by the Epic Channel, directed by Anurag Basu (Season 1) or Robi Thakurer Golpo, transmitted on Colours Bangla in 2015 and directed by Abhijit Guha and Rudeshna Roy.

Kabuliwala had three posthumous cinema adaptations, due to its richness in universal “themes of parental love, friendship beyond cultural and ethnical boundaries, oblivion and remembrance, and of the redemptive dimensions of innocence and hope”. (p. 129) The author offers conclusions and reasons for this short story’s popularity on the screen at different times and by different people: “Even if departing from the initial story in a loose adaptation, this film truly remains in the spirit of Tagore’s fictional world, highlighting ethical values and emphasizing deeply human emotions in a successful attempt to visually translate it. It is a celebration of storytelling”. (p. 133)

In conclusion, there is much more unity in this volume than can be envisaged at first glance. Once the academic or the curious reader finishes the last line he knows and feels a remarkable sympathy for the gigantic figure of Tagore, who definitely needs new approaches and renewed reading. His art needs different “consumers” in different cultures and times for it is one of those rare cases of a self-regenerating engine powered by universal symbolism. As the editors of this volume posit, “this volume is the perfect example of his prolific and versatile personality, inspiring people from different countries and bringing them together in a «song offering» of his character.” (p. 1) It is an excellent instrument not only for connoisseurs, but especially for those who wish to take further steps into the immense, “prolific and versatile” personality and legacy of Tagore as first and foremost a Bengali genius and ultimately a universal one.

Mirel Bănică, *Între două lumi. Monahismul orthodox și modernitatea* [Between Two Worlds. Orthodox Monasticism and Modernity], Iași: Polirom, 2024, 297 p., ISBN 978-973-469640-6.

Anca Bălan*

Discussing religiosity and religion is a complex task due to their profound and intimate nature at the individual level, which makes their understanding challenging in a shared context. Furthermore, the operational aspects of religious organisations involve structural characteristics that complicate the study of religiosity. Despite these obstacles, anthropologist Mirel Bănică has scientifically delved into a lesser-known element of the Romanian religious world: Orthodox monasticism. This topic is particularly challenging due to the scarcity of Romanian social science literature and the low social visibility of monasticism because of its fundamental characteristics.

Mirel Bănică's approach materialised in a book published at Polirom Publishing House in February 2024. The book aligns with Mirel Bănică's interest in the current Romanian religious world; he has published other books on religious topics, such as *The Place of Other: Orthodoxy in Modernity* (Paideia, 2007) and *The Need of Miracles. The Pilgrimage phenomenon in contemporary Romania* (Polirom, 2014).

From a structural-compositional perspective, the volume has a spherical character. Two theoretical parts surround the comprehensive field research conducted in 45 monasteries from September, 2020 to June, 2023. Managing the informational aspects involved listing the monasteries in historical regions, with a selection of five areas out of nine, ensuring an asymmetric sampling of the monastic landscape.

The book's title, with a high level of generality, connects two key concepts: Orthodox monasticism and modernity. However, the conceptual frame guiding the field research needs to be explicitly stated; namely, the meaning of the above two concepts needs to be more accurate. For instance, modernity is considered a historical period that ended around 1950. The long and fruitful debate about modernity must be mentioned. Some other concepts were launched in this debate: late modernity, second modernity, postmodernity, and multiple modernities. What concept does the researcher consider particularly in his research? What are the

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characteristics of modernity that monasticism had to adjust to? In addition, cultural factors don't play any role in identifying these two ideal types in social reality.

The title suggests the double oscillation of monasticism: between tradition and modernity and between the social world and the ideal one towards which it aspires. A crossing point occurs since entering modernity is associated with entering the social world, the last equating with coming down to the layman's standard. The compromise of monasticism with modernity determines "the internal secularisation of the monasteries and the decreasing of the eschatological tension" (p.251) between Christianity and the contemporary world. The author identifies some elements of compromise: church tourism, bio-eco products (the monastic economy), and the change in internal authority. At the same time, these elements are considered to have axiomatic value at the theoretical level (p.11). This balancing confuses the reader regarding how knowledge is acquired: inductive or deductive?

Monasticism represents, for the author, the key to understanding the relationship between religion and modernity (p.9), being an accurate image of the "tension" in this relationship. Also, monasticism is understood as a powerful explanatory factor of the current Romanian religious field. The reasons for its selection as an explanatory factor and the temporal selection of its action are unclear. Why does it explain only the post-communist period and not the entire period of its existence in the Romanian world? Thus, a temporal framing would have been preferred to clarify some features of the post-communist period compared to other periods of monasticism in the Romanian religious field.

Mirel Bănică has chosen "the monastic economy" (p.14) from all facets through which Orthodox monasticism can be considered – theological, historical, and geographical (p. 250). This facet is important because it indicates monasteries' adjustment to the contemporary world's characteristics (p.286), taking over the ecological and sustainability principles specific to it in their efforts to survive (pp.250-251). Thus, inside the Marxist paradigm, the existence of the most valuable religious fact in the Orthodox field – monasticism – is explained using an economic factor, namely the transformation of monastic crafting into an economic process. The author presents monasteries which don't perform an economic process (Golia and Bistrița monasteries). It would be challenging to determine the distinction between them and the others, which developed a successful economic process.

The scarcity of literature on this topic (p. 250) determines the selection of Western bibliographical sources (p.251) that address Catholic monasticism. So, a few references from the Orthodox cultural field, in general, and the Romanian cultural space, in particular, provide a vague conceptual definition of monasticism and don't consider the differentiation of Catholic monasticism from the Orthodox one. However, this aim was pursued as intention (p. 16) and necessity (p.89). The unity of the two types of monasticism is acquired through their incorporation into the concept of monasticism as a "utopian project" (p.10). It is "the distinction of reference to society which aims at the perfect society features" (p.11). Following the sociologist J. Segny's idea (pp.272-278), three dimensions frame the operational definition of monasticism as a utopian project: life structuring (of the space and the social and physical time), the relationship between rural and urban (escaping from daily social space) and personal relationships. To what extent is this concept a valuable tool for understanding Romanian Orthodox monasticism? This is a challenging question, especially regarding the second dimension, that of the separation of the lay world from the monastic world. Archimandrite Ioanichie Bălan's toponymic research demonstrates the hermitage-related origin of Romanian monasticism and its roots in "small brotherhoods". They refer to groups of laymen with high religious importance who had chosen to live near the village church in a close spiritual relationship with the priest. The phenomenon of rural hermitages occurred before the end of the first Christian millennium. Archimandrite Ioanichie Bălan considered rural hermitages an incipient monastic life structure, pointing out that the Romanian cenobitic and anchoritic monasticism would develop from these. Even in the case of the second type, the anchorite and his followers always communicated with the inhabitants of the nearby villages. If a hermitage was near a village, the first houses would appear surrounding it, a new village being built. Also, if the hermitage was in difficult to reach places, the anchorite and his followers would come to more accessible places for villagers after some generations. Thus, there is an intercommunication between the lay world and the monastic one in the Romanian Orthodox field, questioning the validity of monastic utopia as a tool for understanding Romanian religious reality.

Another topic that invites us to reflect is the divide that manifests in two situations –between the conceptual framework and the field research. Firstly, the incongruence between the originating concept - monastic utopia - and the description of the visited monasteries is observed.

Conceptually, the focus is on how the monastic project loses its utopian features because of the compromise with modernity, which refers to transforming traditional monastic handmade crafts into an economic process. Practically, the collected data refer to the conceptual framework to a small extent. Secondly, what is the conceptual connection between monastic utopia and Christian utopia? The meaning of the two concepts is skipped over because the stake of the Christian world is the same for all its participants: the Christian utopia. The rules for lay people inside the Christian world are valid to the same extent for attaining the field's stake as the monastic rules. Therefore, the monastic utopia concept is less specific to the Christian world.

The ethnographic approach is explicitly pursued as methodology, along with the methods of participant observation and the experience of living in the studied community for a long time. The author mentions the difficulties of the research field many times in the book: finding accommodations, developing a proper conversation with the monks because of the communication barriers they raise, and the mention of topics considered sensitive by them. The last difficulty causes the author to frequently associate the monastery with a "secret society" (p.72).

A two-stage sampling is used: 1. randomly selecting an unspecified number of monasteries from all 844 hermitages and monasteries and visiting them; 2. selection of 45 monasteries from the visited monasteries which are considered to be "the most significant for the understanding of the current monastic reality" (p.20). A well-defined criterion isn't used in the first stage. In the second stage, the selection criterion is "the monasteries noticed in the market due to their cosmetics or nutritional products" (p.14). Nevertheless, the selection criterion isn't used every time. It can also be a waypoint on the route (Războieni monastery), "discovering Transylvanian nationalism in action" (Mihai-Vodă monastery) or reading from a book (Bucium monastery). Along the same lines, specific indicators don't define the importance of a monastery in Romanian marketing. The reader could use various indicators instead, such as the number of customers/tourists, the number of products the monastery sells over a certain period, the product quality, the visibility of the products on social media, and the list could continue.

The research data are presented in the second part of the book. The reader easily identifies the researcher's strategy for collecting the data. Presentation of each monastery starts with natural and social environmental descriptions, and some historical perspectives are used when possible.

The author “photographs” (p.249) diverse characters who give life to the monastic world (ordinary monks, monks in charge of the unfolding economic process, permanent or chance visitors), but also events that animate (religious services) or preserve monastic history (monastic museums). He pursues a comprehensive perspective. Therefore, in addition to the short visits to the monasteries, the author describes his participation in the Rebra-Parva monastery community events and his engagement in its activities (pp.182-197). The experience of living in the Rebra-Parva monastery community confirms its efficacy in data collecting as a central method of the ethnographic approach. In this context, it must be mentioned that the Orthodox monastic world’s uniformity coexists with the variation between the monasteries. Diversity is mirrored not only in the monasteries’ economic dimension but also in their religious one. Thus, from a methodological angle, the two years that the researcher intermittently spent in the monastic world are not similar to the long-term participant observation and the experience of living in a community, even though these years involve his presence in the same world: the monastic one.

The most important place for each visit is the store where the monastery sells religious or other products. The researcher describes all aspects of it accurately: architectural details, elements of spatial organisation, types of products (jam, syrup, preserves, bee products or pastries, teas and various treatments), the packages and the recipes used for their production. The marketability of monastic products is determined by a mixture of “bio-eco fashion, the nostalgia of the olden village, local identity and fascination with the monastic world” (p.252).

The characters accompanying the author in every monastery he enters are that of a monastery’s representative and that of a layman: the store salesperson, a pilgrim, a tourist, or a close friend of the monastery. Also, the researcher looks for an informer from the social environment to which the monastery belongs, which is essential to provide an emic and etic perspective simultaneously. A selection from literary works or information from online searches supplements the researcher’s observations. Even if this complementary information doesn’t always match the economic dimension of a monastery, it reveals the author’s effort in documentation.

The author’s voice is the most active in structuring and interpreting the data. However, “calling a friend” is an innovative technique to clarify some religious subjects. The friend is an active participant in the religious field. The author renounces his own competence in interpreting the data

in favour of the friend's explanation regarding the disinterest in using natural resources in economic activity at Bucium monastery, the constant building activity inside the monasteries, the new churches in the courtyards of the old monasteries, or the use of new materials in the process of the church building.

The researcher's attitude towards his field of expertise (in the various states of it: a religious fact, a participant in the religious field or outside of it) is that of a realistic writer. He anticipates facts and knows the meaning of them: the nun's behaviour is "innate, with no ostentatious, artificial or insincere details" (p.82), a monk "tries to convince himself more than ourselves that his choice to be a monk is appropriate" (p.120), a bakery from Horezu monastery looks artificial (p.140), the pilgrims have a false impression about their actions (p. 150), a head scarf is worn "perfunctorily" (p.138), some monastics are labelled as missing their vocation (p. 23) . In the same context, another topic for discussion is the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in ethnography, which is a rational way of knowing reality despite its descriptive character. Verbs of perception are quite numerous in the text: "it feels", "I feel" (p.42, 140), "I think" (p.71, 101, 127), "I suspect" (p.102, 105, 127), "It seems" (p.73, 195, 260), "it gave the impression" (p.77). They originate in the author's quality of being an observer but contrast with the reader's expectations of generalisation as suggested by the title. Also, they create an unstable image of the approach and suggest the idea of cognitive reductionism to the author's subjectivity. The author admits his subjectivity (pp.38, 123, 160) but doesn't counterbalance its effect. This instability is also created by the author's admission that he regrets that time doesn't allow him to thoroughly consider certain aspects of his approach (p.47, 97, 157).

The economic dimension is the central topic of the interviews. However, data about other facets of current monastic life is also offered. These regard medical (the infirmaries of the Turnu or Horezu monasteries) and cultural aspects (such as museums from the Nămăiești and Agapia monasteries). Still, they are described without any connection with the economic one. Thus, a fragmented picture of the monastery is outlined, contrasting with that of the monastery as a little community. Mirel Bănică believes that the main characteristics of the monastic economy are sustainability, the promotion of the local ecosystem, proximity to the natural cycle, resilience, small-scale manufacturing, and "person-to-person" marketing (p.252). The researcher focuses on the economic process carried out in the monasteries, but not all its stages have the same

visibility, the author pointing out mainly product marketing. The reader can summarise some of the economic strategies used by monasteries as revealed by the data: precisely identifying attractive and unused products (Turnu and Petru-Vodă monasteries), the collaboration with chemists (Turnu and Petru-Vodă monasteries), increasing profitability using technology (Văratec and Nera monasteries), the transfer of skills and knowledge from one monastery to others (Văratec monastery), the collaborative partnership for promoting products (Dragomirna monastery), the application for European funds (Negru Vodă, Comana, and Horezu monasteries). A challenging discussion could be launched: What factors determine the choice of economic strategies?

Some typologies can be considered using data in the book. Mirel Bănică proposes three types of typologies of visitors (p.77, 7.87, 8.256). I present only two types of them. The pilgrim-tourist has an average income, is retired, valorises religious souvenirs, looks for affordable accommodations, and has no defined spiritual purposes. The closer friend of the monastery builds relationships with monks and spends much time taking care of the monastery, is accommodated inside the monastery, and offers help to the monastery. The reader himself can find a typology of the monasteries. Some monasteries are producers, and their variation is determined by the level of technology used, knowledge, and expertise, as well as the distinction between nun monastery and monk monastery. Some monasteries are not producers, only retailers.

Regarding the conclusion, the author admits the unfinished character of the book because of the vastness of his subject of study (p.249). However, a conclusion for sure is that “there doesn’t exist a monastic economy in Romania, currently, but more monastic economies” (p. 251). However, the keywords that describe Romanian monasticism’s unity are tradition, nostalgia, and patrimonialism (p.258).

The rhetorical questions throughout the book’s text are essential for future research on other dimensions of monastic life: Can the monastery be defined? What happens when a utopia routinises itself and turns into a habit? Why do poor monasteries produce honey and no other products? I would draw attention to additional aspects that require consideration: the longitudinal perspective on the economic process, the factors determining this process and its authenticity. Alongside the abundance of data, these elements turn Mirel Bănică’s work into an invitation to continue profound research on Romanian Orthodox monasticism.

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Books Received / Eingegangene Rezensionsexemplare

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Freedom. Responsibility. Meaning of Life **Existential Perspectives on Poverty and Education** **RES 3/2024**

The aim of education is to live a good life. Our life succeeds and unfolds meaning when we develop as a personality and, on this basis, can live a life in freedom that we can justify to ourselves and to others with inner approval. In order to grow well into this adventure of life, conducive relationships in the family and educational system are of decisive importance. These are embedded in a social and societal environment that either has a supporting effect or hinders development.

Poverty or exclusion of social groups represent a toxic environment that calls the ability of children to lead a meaningful life massively and fundamentally into question. On the other hand, material prosperity alone does not guarantee that children will have the supportive relationships that will help them grow and mature and that they need to achieve the goal of a successful life.

The current issue of RES aims to focus on these outlined perspectives on education based on different and interdisciplinary approaches and to examine them together in an international European context. Viewed from the - poor as well as wealthy - margins of society, education and upbringing faces very fundamental questions: What do children need not only to survive or to “function” sufficiently well, but to lead a good life? What role can educational institutions play in this? What is the contribution of religion and the church to this question - historically, currently but also in perspective? What responsibility do we have in a common Europe? We invite authors to approach this weighty topic in dialogue between West and East, between theory and practice, between history and the present, theologically as well as from the perspective of non-theological disciplines (e.g. philosophy, education, art history, political science, etc.).

Guest-Editors: Teresa Leonhard and Helmut P. Gaisbauer

Submission deadline: August 30, 2024

Freiheit. Verantwortung. Lebenssinn
Existenzielle Perspektiven auf Armut und Bildung
RES 3/2024

Ziel von Bildung ist gelingende Lebensführung. Unser Leben gelingt dann und entfaltet Sinn, wenn wir uns als Persönlichkeit entwickeln und auf dieser Grundlage in Freiheit ein Leben führen können, das wir mit innerer Zustimmung vor uns selbst und vor anderen verantworten können. Um gut in dieses Abenteuer Leben hineinzuwachsen, sind förderliche Beziehungen in Familie und Erziehungswesen von entscheidender Bedeutung. Diese sind eingebettet in ein soziales und gesellschaftliches Umfeld, das tragende Wirkung entfaltet oder aber Entwicklung verhindert.

Armut oder soziale Ausgrenzung gesellschaftlicher Gruppen stellen ein geradezu toxisches Umfeld dar, in dem die Befähigung von Kindern zu einem sinnerfüllten Lebensvollzug massiv und sehr grundlegend in Frage steht. Andererseits bietet aber auch materieller Wohlstand allein keine Garantie, dass Kinder jene förderlichen Beziehungsangebote bekommen, die ihr Wachsen und Reifen unterstützt und die sie für das angestrebte Ziel einer gelingenden Lebensführung bräuchten.

Die vorliegende Ausgabe von RES soll diese skizzierten Perspektiven auf Bildung auf Basis unterschiedlicher und interdisziplinärer Ansätze tiefer beleuchten und gemeinsam im internationalen europäischen Kontext beleuchten. Von den – armen wie wohlhabenden – Rändern der Gesellschaft her betrachtet, stehen Bildung und Erziehung vor sehr grundsätzlichen Fragen: Was benötigen Kinder, um nicht nur zu überleben oder ausreichend gut zu „funktionieren“, sondern ein gutes Leben zu führen? Welche Rolle können Bildungsreinrichtungen dabei übernehmen? Welcher Beitrag von Religion und Kirche zu dieser Frage zeigt sich historisch, aktuell oder aber auch perspektivisch? Welche Verantwortung haben wir in einem gemeinsamen Europa? Wir laden Autorinnen und Autoren ein, sich diesem gewichtigen Thema im Dialog zwischen West und Ost, zwischen Theorie und Praxis, zwischen Geschichte und Gegenwart theologisch wie auch aus Perspektive nicht-theologischer Disziplinen zu nähern (z. B. Philosophie, Pädagogik, Kunstgeschichte, Politikwissenschaft usw.).

Gastherausgeber: Teresa Leonhard und Helmut P. Gaisbauer

Einsendeschluss: 30. August 2024

**“We Choose Abundant Life”
RES 1/2025**

An ecumenical group of Middle Eastern Christians published in 2021 the document “We Choose Abundant Life”, and the document is today available in Arabic, English, French, German, and Danish translations. The group of Arabic-speaking Christian women and men from different Churches and with different professional background met monthly for several years in preparation of the document. The document sums up their theological, social, and political analysis of the situation of Christians in the Middle East today. Especially themes such as citizenship, ecology, youth, corruption, and the societal role of Churches are discussed. The document is characterized by its contextual method as well as its dialogical qualities, and thus stimulates and inspires a critical and ecumenical conversation across Middle Eastern churches and beyond.

Middle Eastern Christians face several pressing challenges. Changed religious demography, migration and streams of refugees caused by conflicts and wars as well as by lacking ability of weak states to protect citizens and maintain religious diversity have all contributed to empty the Middle East of Christians.

Historically, the document “We Choose Abundant Life” argues, the Middle East has been characterized by diversity – ethnically, religiously, and culturally. This diversity has been a source for inspiration and exchange as well as conflict and war. In the last half century, religious sectarianism and fundamentalism has contributed to conflict and war. This has changed the political rhetoric and societal understanding of majority and minority relations. The result has been an eroding of freedom rights, democracy, and social justice.

During the Arab Spring uprisings in 2010-2011, the question about citizenship and its relation to other identities – gender, religious, ethnic, and cultural – became much debated. Today protesting voices and reform movement have been suppressed and no political change happened. But the ideas have spread and continue to be discussed, also in Middle Eastern Christian theology. In contrast to contemporary politicized and Islamized Arabism, the document identifies 19th Century Arabism to constitute a more inclusive cultural and political identity allowing for a renewed understanding of Middle Eastern Christian identity and ecclesiology. Rather than viewing oneself as a “Christian segment” and the churches as “Christian sects”, the Christians of the Middle East should view themselves as citizens contributing to the common good of ethnically and religiously diverse societies, the document argues.

The coming issue of RES aims to explore and reflect on the contemporary Middle Eastern Christian contextual and societal theology presented in the document. RES invites for contributions on the themes of the document as well as articles engaging in discussion with the analysis of the document.

Guest-Editors: Peter Lodberg and Jonas Adelin Jørgensen

Submission deadline: November 15, 2024

**„We Choose Abundant Life“
RES 1/2025**

Eine ökumenische Gruppe von Christen aus dem Nahen Osten veröffentlichte im Jahr 2021 das Dokument „We Choose Abundant live“, das heute in arabischer, englischer, französischer, deutscher und dänischer Übersetzung vorliegt. Die Gruppe arabischsprachiger Christinnen und Christen aus verschiedenen Kirchen und Berufsgruppen traf sich mehrere Jahre lang monatlich, um das Dokument vorzubereiten, das ihre theologische, soziale und politische Analyse der Situation der Christen im Nahen Osten zusammenfasst. Insbesondere werden Themen wie Staatsbürgerschaft, Ökologie, Jugend, Korruption und die gesellschaftliche Rolle der Kirchen erörtert. Das Dokument zeichnet sich durch seine kontextbezogene Methode sowie seine dialogischen Qualitäten aus und regt somit ein kritisches und ökumenisches Gespräch zwischen den Kirchen des Nahen Ostens und darüber hinaus an.

Die Christinnen und Christen im Nahen Osten stehen vor dringenden Herausforderungen. Die veränderte religiöse Demografie, die Migration und die Flüchtlingsströme, verursacht durch Konflikte und Kriege sowie durch die mangelnde Fähigkeit schwacher Staaten, ihre Bürger zu schützen und die religiöse Vielfalt zu erhalten: dies alles hat dazu beigetragen, dass viele den Nahen Osten verlassen haben.

Historisch gesehen, so heißt es in dem Dokument, ist der Nahe Osten von Vielfalt geprägt – ethnisch, religiös und kulturell. Diese Vielfalt war eine Quelle der Inspiration und des Austauschs, aber auch eine Quelle von Konflikten und Kriegen. Im letzten halben Jahrhundert haben religiöses Sekterertum und Fundamentalismus zu Konflikten und Kriegen beigetragen. Diese haben die politische Rhetorik und das gesellschaftliche Verständnis der Beziehungen zwischen Mehrheit und Minderheit verändert. Das Ergebnis war eine Aushöhlung der Freiheitsrechte, der Demokratie und der sozialen Gerechtigkeit.

Während der Aufstände des Arabischen Frühlings in den Jahren 2010-2011 wurde die Frage der Staatsbürgerschaft und ihrer Beziehung zu anderen Identitäten – Geschlecht, Religion, Ethnie und Kultur – heftig diskutiert. Heute werden die Proteste und die Reformbewegung unterdrückt, und es ist kein politischer Wandel eingetreten. Aber die Ideen haben sich verbreitet und werden weiterhin diskutiert, auch in der christlichen Theologie des Nahen Ostens. Im Gegensatz zum heutigen politisierten und islamisierten Arabismus stellt das Dokument fest, dass der Arabismus des 19. Jahrhunderts eine umfassendere kulturelle und politische Identität darstellt, die ein neues Verständnis der christlichen Identität und Ekklesiologie im Nahen Osten ermöglicht. Anstatt sich als „christliches Segment“ und die Kirchen

als „christliche Sekten“ zu betrachten, sollten sich die Christen des Nahen Ostens als Bürger sehen, die zum Gemeinwohl ethnisch und religiös vielfältiger Gesellschaften beitragen, so das Dokument.

Die geplante Ausgabe von RES zielt auf die gegenwärtige christliche Theologie im Kontext der Gesellschaft des Nahen Ostens, wie sie im Dokument vorgestellt wird. RES bittet um Beiträge zu den Themen des Dokuments sowie um Artikel, die sich mit der Analyse des Dokuments auseinandersetzen.

Gastherausgeber: Peter Lodberg und Jonas Adelin Jørgensen

Einsendeschluss: 30. November 2024

Jesus' Jewishness in the Aftermath of Nicaea
RES 2/2025

The main theological struggles of the first millennium focused on the Jesus' divinity. At the Council of Nicaea 325 the dogma of the full divinity of Jesus was formulated and the subsequent councils underlined rather his divine role in the salvation of humankind. Not Jesus the Jew, and fewer Jesus the man of Galilee, but the "cosmic Christ" was in the middle of the long debates of the Christian Theology over centuries. The 20th century eventually changed this ductus through the sad experience of the Holocaust and other atrocities. As an upshot, many Christians and Churches started to rediscover and re-evaluate the humanity of Jesus and the Jewish roots of their own liturgy, the Jewishness of the New Testament, and the Jewishness of Jesus himself. Important steps for the Jewish-Christian Dialogue were already made.

In this issue of RES, we want to reflect on the role of the Jewishness of Jesus in the aftermath of the Councils of Nicaea. Since both councils Nicaea 325 and 787 are so important for the Eastern Church, we invite authors to reflect on the relevance of the Jesus' Jewishness for the nowadays theology. Helpful questions would be: In what degree could Christians find a common ground for speaking about Jesus together with Jews if we are aware of both his divinity among Christians and his rejection among the Jewish tradition? What about the role of the icons, hymnography and generally of the Christian art and liturgy? In what degree do they separate and how much potential for dialogue with Judaism can we find in them?

Guest-Editor: Alexandru Ioniță

Submission deadline: February 1, 2025

Das Judentum Jesu nach Nicäa RES 2/2025

Die wichtigsten theologischen Auseinandersetzungen des ersten Jahrtausends konzentrierten sich auf die Göttlichkeit Jesu. Auf dem Konzil von Nizäa 325 wurde das Dogma von der vollen Göttlichkeit Jesu formuliert, und die nachfolgenden Konzilien unterstrichen vielmehr seine göttliche Rolle bei der Erlösung der Menschheit. Nicht Jesus, der Jude, und weniger Jesus, der Mann aus Galiläa, sondern der „kosmische Christus“ stand im Mittelpunkt der langen Debatten der christlichen Theologie über Jahrhunderte. Das 20. Jahrhundert veränderte diesen Duktus schließlich durch die traurige Erfahrung des Holocausts und anderer Gräueltaten. In der Folge begannen viele Christen und Kirchen, die Menschlichkeit Jesu und die jüdischen Wurzeln ihrer eigenen Liturgie, das Judentum des Neuen Testaments und das Judentum Jesu selbst wiederzuentdecken und neu zu bewerten. Wichtige Schritte für den jüdisch-christlichen Dialog wurden bereits unternommen.

In dieser Ausgabe von RES wollen wir über die Rolle des Judentums Jesu in der Zeit nach den Konzilien von Nizäa nachdenken. Da die beiden Konzile von Nizäa 325 und 787 für die Ostkirche so wichtig sind, laden wir Autoren ein, über die Bedeutung des Judentums Jesu für die heutige Theologie nachzudenken. Hilfreiche Fragen wären: Inwieweit können Christen eine gemeinsame Basis finden, um mit Juden über Jesus zu sprechen, wenn wir uns sowohl seiner Göttlichkeit unter Christen als auch seiner Ablehnung in der jüdischen Tradition bewusst sind? Wie steht es mit der Rolle der Ikonen, der Hymnographie und allgemein der christlichen Kunst und Liturgie? Inwieweit unterscheiden sie sich und wie viel Potenzial für einen Dialog mit dem Judentum können wir in ihnen finden?

Gastherausgeber: Alexandru Ioniță

Einsendeschluss: 1. Februar, 2025

Συμ-πάθεια

Vatican II Legacy: Churches as Feeling Bodies in Relation with the World

RES 3/2025

Sixty years after the end of the Second Vatican Council, it would be instructive to reread what Pope Paul VI, the first hermeneut of an event that would have constituted a watershed in the history of churches and humanity, stated:

And what happened? Was there a clash, a battle, a condemnation?
There could have been, but there was none. The old story of the Samaritan has been the model of the spirituality of the council. A feeling of boundless sympathy has permeated the whole of it.

These words, pronounced during the last public session of the Council on 7 December 1965, still deserve to be weighed. The Council identified “dialogue” as the fundamental category on which to re-establish the church’s relations with the contemporary world, in three directions: towards all that is human, the believers of the other religions, and all Christians. However, Paul VI, speaking of “sympathy”, a term apparently derived from the most ordinary style of conversation, adds an even more passionate tone to the solemnity of the conciliar statements. This expression could raise today a fundamental question: with all the painful and problematic things that have happened in the meantime, is it still possible to speak of “sympathy” as that essential attitude that all churches could embody in their relationship with each other and with the world? And towards religions, in a time so marked by fratricidal struggles in the name of God?

To answer these crucial questions, we can find inspiration from the etymology of the term “sympathy”, which ultimately derives from the Greek verb “sympathèō”, essentially meaning: “I experience the same affections”. Sympathy, therefore, is not just an instinctive inclination, which attracts people towards one another, but it is precisely that spiritual and emotional attitude which Jesus maintained in his earthly life: he suffered with us and for us. Then, according to the perspective of biology, “sympathy” can also describe that specific relationship which exists among two or more organs in a given body, so that the affection of one is transmitted to the other: this can bring us to mind the Pauline symbolism of the bodily Church (see for example 1Cor 12,12-26), whereby, if even just one of its parts suffers, the whole suffers with it. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate whether this analogy, eventually alluded to by the papal address, can be applied in a more systematic way not only in the intra-ecclesial domains, but also –

contextually – in the fields of the ecumenical, interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

Guest-Editors: Martino Mortola and Pietro Lorenzo Maggioni

Submission deadline: June 15, 2025

Συμ-πάθεια

Das Erbe des Vaticanum II:

**Die Kirche als empfindungsfähiger Leib in Beziehung zur Welt
RES 3/2025**

Sechzig Jahre nach dem Ende des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils wäre es aufschlussreich, noch einmal nachzulesen, was Papst Paul VI. sagte, der erste Hermeneut eines Ereignisses, das sich als Wendepunkt in der Geschichte der Kirchen und der Menschheit darstellen sollte:

Und was geschah? Gab es einen Zusammenstoß, einen Kampf, eine Verurteilung? Es hätte einen geben können, aber es gab keinen. Die alte Geschichte des Samariters war das Vorbild für die Spiritualität des Konzils. Ein Gefühl grenzenlosen Mitgefühls hat das ganze Konzil durchdrungen.

Diese Worte, die während der letzten öffentlichen Sitzung des Konzils am 7. Dezember 1965 ausgesprochen wurden, verdienen es, in ihrer Bedeutung ernstgenommen zu werden. Das Konzil bezeichnete den „Dialog“ als grundlegende Kategorie, um die Beziehungen der Kirche zur heutigen Welt in drei Richtungen zu erneuern: gegenüber allem Menschlichen, gegenüber den Gläubigen der anderen Religionen und gegenüber allen Christen. Wenn Paul VI. jedoch von „Sympathie“ spricht, einem Begriff aus der Alltagssprache, verleiht er dem Ernst der konziliaren Erklärungen einen leidenschaftlichen Ton. Dieser Ausdruck könnte heute eine grundsätzliche Frage aufwerfen: Ist es bei all den schmerzlichen und problematischen Dingen, die in der Zwischenzeit geschehen sind, noch möglich, von „Sympathie“ als jener wesentlichen Haltung zu sprechen, die alle Kirchen in ihren Beziehungen zueinander und zur Welt verkörpern könnten? Und gegenüber den Religionen in einer Zeit, die so sehr von brudermörderischen Kämpfen im Namen Gottes geprägt ist?

Zur Beantwortung dieser Fragen können wir uns von der Etymologie des Begriffs „Sympathie“ inspirieren lassen, der sich vom griechischen Verb „sympathèō“ ableitet, was im Wesentlichen bedeutet: „Ich empfinde dasselbe“. Sympathie ist also nicht einfach eine Neigung der Instinkte im Sinne der gegenseitigen Anziehung, sondern sie ist jene geistliche und seelische Haltung, die Jesus in seinem irdischen Leben gekennzeichnet hat: Er hat mit uns und für uns gelitten. Aus der Sicht der Biologie kann „Sympathie“ auch die Beziehung beschreiben, die zwischen zwei oder mehreren Organen eines Körpers besteht, so dass die Affektion des einen auf das andere übertragen wird: Dies kann uns an die paulinische Symbolik der Kirche als Leib erinnern (siehe z.B. 1Kor 12,12-26), bei der, wenn auch nur einer ihrer Teile

leidet, das Ganze mit ihm leidet. Es wäre daher interessant zu untersuchen, ob diese Analogie, auf die die päpstliche Ansprache letztlich hinzielt, in systematischer Weise nicht nur im innerkirchlichen Bereich, sondern auch - kontextbezogen - im Bereich des ökumenischen, interreligiösen und interkulturellen Dialogs angewendet werden kann.

Gastherausgeber: Martino Mortola and Pietro Lorenzo Maggioni

Einsendetermin: 15. Juni 2025

Migration and Ecumenism – Crises and Hospitality

RES 1/2026

For the past decades, Europe witnessed large-scale movements of people who left their home country for multiple reasons, including violent conflicts, changes in climate, or financial necessity. In response, churches, Church leaders, and church-based NGOs had to accommodate newcomers from a broad range of different nationalities and religions. As a result, they had to deal with many issues concerning, for example, multi-faith interactions, transnational belonging, church sponsorship of migrants, rising tensions, or peaceful co-existence. The various migration is inevitable changing the relations between and within Christian groups. This could be various canonical diaspora conflicts between Orthodox groups in western Europe or new ecclesial bounds between the Protestant, Orthodox and Catholics. The transformation of the religious landscape in Europe and beyond due to migration vacillates between crises and hospitality.

This special issue invites papers from a broad area that address this ecclesial form of hospitality and conflicts and its impact on ecumenism. We welcome contributions dealing with the topic from a theoretical, theological, or empirical angle. We seek to stimulate a discussion on how the changing circumstances and new challenges influence the hosts and the guests and how those interactions change over time. In other words, we encourage papers exploring the dynamics of hospitality and crises in the ecclesial context to provide further insights into how migration transforms ecumenism.

Guest-Editor: Emil Hilton Saggau

Submission deadline: November 15, 2025

Migration und Ökumene – Krisen und Gastfreundschaft **RES 1/2026**

In den letzten Jahrzehnten erlebte Europa große Wanderungsbewegungen von Menschen, die ihr Heimatland aus unterschiedlichen Gründen verließen, darunter gewaltsame Konflikte, Klimaveränderungen oder finanzielle Not. Als Reaktion darauf nahmen Kirchen, Kirchenleitungen und kirchliche Nichtregierungsorganisationen Neuankömmlinge aus einem breiten Spektrum verschiedener Nationalitäten und Religionen auf. Dabei mussten sie sich mit vielen Fragen auseinandersetzen; zu nennen sind z. B. multireligiöse Interaktionen, transnationale Zugehörigkeit, kirchliche Patenschaften für Migranten, wachsende Spannungen oder friedliche Koexistenz. Die verschiedenen Migrationsbewegungen verändern unweigerlich die Beziehungen zwischen und innerhalb der christlichen Gruppen. Dazu gehören unter anderem kanonische Konflikte zwischen verschiedenen orthodoxen Diaspora-Gruppen in Westeuropa oder neue Abgrenzungen zwischen Protestanten, Orthodoxen und Katholiken. Die migrationsbedingte Veränderung der religiösen Landschaft in Europa und darüber hinaus schwankt zwischen Krisen und Gastfreundschaft.

Diese Themenummer von RES lädt zu Beiträgen aus einem breiten Spektrum ein, die sich mit diesen kirchlichen Formen von Gastfreundschaft und Konflikten und ihren Auswirkungen auf die Ökumene befassen. Die Aufsätze können das Thema aus theoretischer, theologischer oder empirischer Sicht behandeln. Wir möchten eine Diskussion darüber anregen, wie die sich verändernden Umstände und neuen Herausforderungen sowohl die Gastgeber als auch die Gäste beeinflussen und wie sich diese Interaktionen im Laufe der Zeit verändern. Mit anderen Worten: Wir ermutigen zu Beiträgen, die sich mit der Dynamik von Gastfreundschaft und Krisen im kirchlichen Kontext befassen, um weitere Erkenntnisse darüber zu gewinnen, wie Migration die Ökumene verändert.

Gastherausgeber: Emil Hilton Saggau

Einsendeschluss: 15. November, 2025

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